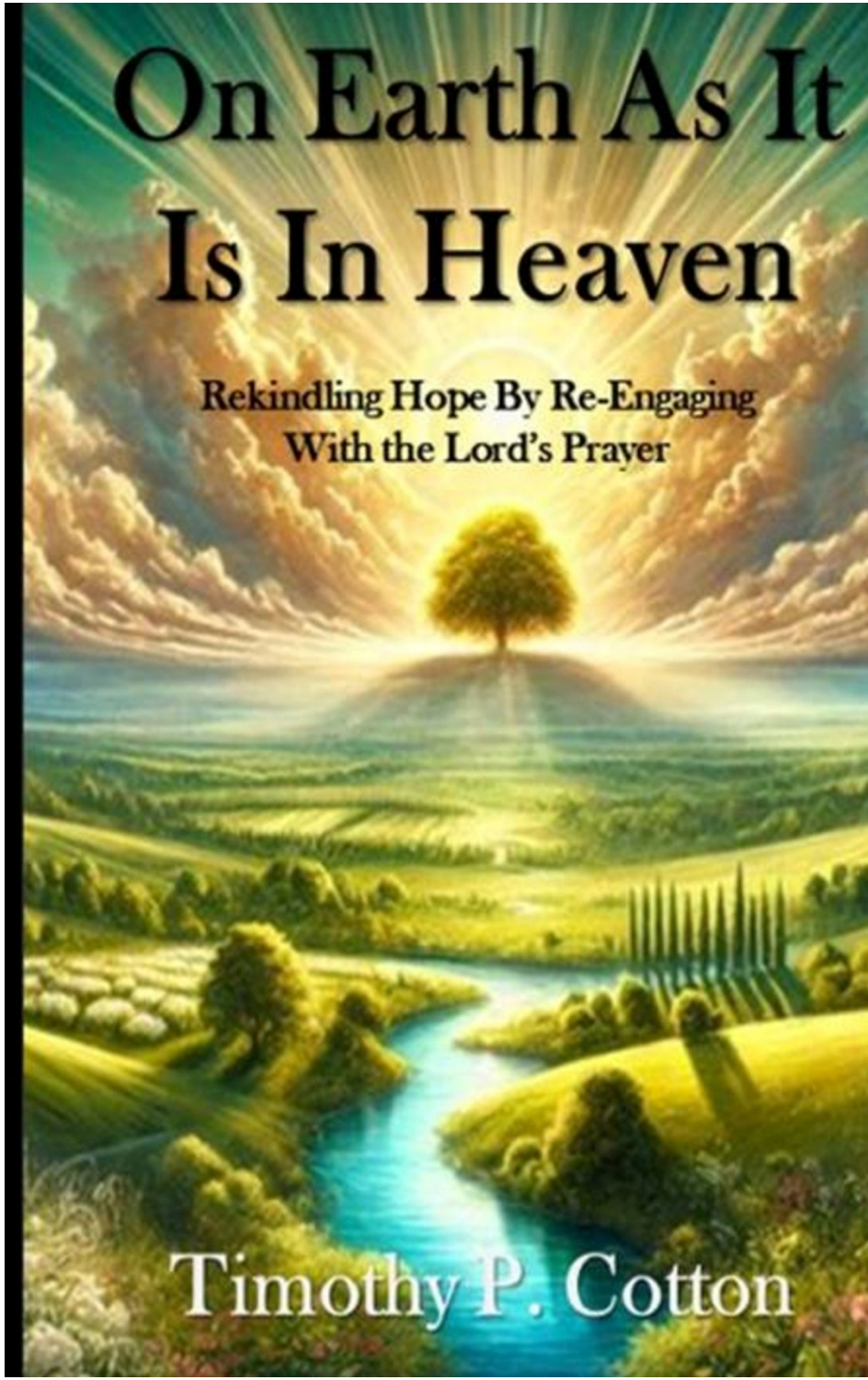
On Earth As It Is In Heaven
Rekindling Hope By Re-Engaging With the Lord's Prayer
Timothy P. Cotton

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A publication of Truth and Way Ministries

www.truthandway.org
Orange, VA

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ISBN: 9798309674091

Library of Congress Control Number: 2025903221

Dedicated to the Glory of God,

To my wife Christine,

To my children Brian and Caitlin,

and my grandchildren Artemis, Maverick, and Riley

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work is accomplished with the recognition of all of the people throughout my life who have encouraged me to not blindly accept the norm, to always ask why, and to challenge everything we are told in search of the truth; and especially those who tolerated me endeavoring to do so.

It is especially important that I acknowledge the work of theologians Karl Barth and Juergen Moltmann whose writings and insights have both inspired and informed this book.

I also want to acknowledge the Rev. Dr. Eric J. Titus,
ever my pastor.

In this work, any use of terms such as "man", "he", or "humanity" is intended to be inclusive and not to refer exclusively to one gender, unless specifically indicated. The language reflects an effort to respect all people regardless of gender, and any exceptions to this are noted in the text where appropriate.

1.

What Is The Lord's Prayer?

"Our Father who is in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And do not lead us into temptation,
but deliver us from evil."
Matthew 6.9-13

The Lord's Prayer, or the 'Our Father' as some may know it, is central to the Christian faith. Jesus taught this prayer in his Sermon on the Mount, and it remains an integral part of Christian liturgies, worship services, personal devotions, and the liturgical traditions of diverse "Christian" denominations and traditions.

The Sermon on the Mount (*Matthew 5-7*) is the basis of Jesus' message, whereby we gain an understanding of his mission. It is the very proclamation of the Kingdom of God, one which is a radical, transformative reality both in the present and in the future.

The primary purpose of this sermon was to declare promises of the Kingdom of God and the

teaching of the ethics that are to be found in it. To those in attendance, it was a direct challenge to the entrenched religious legalism and political oppression and remains so today. He offered the hearers an alternative to the Roman Empire's power structures and the Pharisaical emphasis on external righteousness.

The sermon opens with the Beatitudes (Matthew 5.3-12), a revolutionary and radical shift of the world and its values. It was for those whom the world has rejected, those who are poor in spirit, mourning, and persecuted. These are therein blessed. This radical reordering of society was not only spiritual but was both social and political. This demonstrates with clarity that the Kingdom belongs to those who are to trust God over worldly systems. This would have resounding effects on the oppressed people of Galilee, offering them hope against the rule of the empire and the religious hierarchy of religion.

As Jesus continued his ministry through the region, this proved to be a pivotal time in his 'ministry of the Kingdom of God. It begins a crucial phase in his unveiling of this kingdom, which is to be a breaking in of God's future reign into the present, offering a new vision for life.

Jesus had prepared for this all of his life, and it began with his baptism by John the Baptist (Matthew 3.3-17), kicking off his public ministry. After his temptation in the wilderness, the Galilean

Ministry begins, where he calls his first disciples and performs early miracles such as healing the sick and the casting out of demons. As word spread, he gained a reputation as a teacher and a miracle worker. Crowds from Galilee, Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan began to follow him. Then, within the first of the three years of his ministry, he preaches his Sermon on the Mount, his first major public teaching.

While along the northwestern shores of the Sea of Galilee, between Capernaum and Gennesaret, Jesus saw the crowds gathering. He went up to the mountainside and sat down, as teachers customarily did. This mountain imagery brings to mind the encounter between God and Moses on Mount Sinai, bringing to the forefront Jesus' role as a teacher and a lawgiver.

He then proclaimed the Kingdom of God, challenging the values of the world, not just spiritually but physically. These teachings included the ethics of the kingdom, such as to love our enemies and to love one another. All of these being an invitation to begin a life as citizens of the kingdom in the here and now, calling for a new community- one marked by reconciliation, generosity, and mutual support, with forgiveness and peacemaking as the core..

The sermon, likely lasting about an hour based on such sermons of the time, culminated with Jesus speaking about prayer, criticizing some of

their current practices, and offering them a new way to pray and a new prayer itself. This prayer, the Lord's Prayer, also serves as an invitation to actively participate in God's redemptive mission and to remind us of that invitation.

This invitation was, and remains, deeply empowering, especially for ordinary people who feel powerless under imperial and government weight, as well as against religious oppression and legalism.

The prayer Jesus has taught to us is the breaking in of God's kingdom. Being filled with hope and focusing on the fulfillment of God's reign it is eschatological in nature. It speaks to God's Fatherhood as a relationship with his people and his solidarity with humanity as a whole, with a future of social justice, forgiveness, and reconciliation. More importantly, it calls us to action. It is an expression of hope in action, where Christians align their lives with the kingdom that has broken into our present, where we are to align ourselves with the will of God, working toward the full realization of his kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

Jewish Roots

The crowd that gathered on the Mount was largely made up of Jews who were rooted in Jewish traditions and expectations. They would have

found many aspects of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount familiar, including the Lord's Prayer itself.

Grounded in Jewish tradition, his words would have been readily accepted by them. The ethical and spiritual themes would have aligned closely with familiar teachings from the Torah, the Psalms, and the Prophets. Concepts such as mercy, justice, humility, and reliance on God (*cf* Matthew 5.5), as well as the blessing of the meek, reflect the values of Jewish wisdom literature and prophetic tradition as we find in passages such as Micah 6:8.

The structures and themes of the Prayer itself align with common prayer practices. These focus on God's holiness, his kingdom, daily sustenance, and forgiveness, most particularly to those in the Psalms and in the liturgies of the synagogues. The words of forgiveness and of the coming kingdom would have aroused their eschatological hope, which was in step with their understanding of their covenant with God. Even the addressing of God as Father in prayer would have been customary (Isaiah 63.16 and Malachi 2.10). However, Jesus' intimate and communal invocation of him as "Our Father" introduced to them a deeper, more personal relationship with God.

Driven by a combination of political, social, and religious factors during this time in Judea, there was a growing movement of messianic expectations. Therefore, the hearers of Jesus' words would have already been anticipating the

arrival of God's kingdom, awaiting an imminent ushering in of a messianic age of justice and peace. "Your Kingdom Come" (Matthew 6.10) would have been a warm welcome with a sudden and revolutionary theme.

When reinterpreting the Law, Jesus also employed standard rabbinic discourse such as the use of "You have heard that the ancients were told...but I say to you..." (Matthew 5.21-48). Their shared religious culture gave them a familiarity with this style of teaching. Through exposure to the Torah and regular worship in the synagogue, all of this would have been very familiar.

Shemoneh Esrei are the central prayers of Judaism. They consist of the Kaddish, the Shema, and the Amidah, essential parts of the Jewish liturgy. Each of these would have been quite familiar to the general population of Jews. Even the Samaritans, a distinctive religious group closely related to Jews, would have been familiar with the Shema.

The Kaddish is not found in the Hebrew Bible, nor is it in the Old Testament of the Christian Bible. It is a later Jewish liturgical prayer that developed in the post-Temple period after 70 AD. Even so, the theological themes and phrases found within it are deeply rooted in the Hebrew Bible. The spirit of its words reflects key biblical teachings.

There are four main themes of the Kaddish"

1. The Sanctification of God's Name: the Kaddish begins with, "Magnified and sanctified be his great name," reflecting the words found in Ezekiel 36.23, "And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among them." This idea of honoring and sanctifying God's name is central to Jewish worship and appears in texts such as Leviticus 22.32 and Isaiah 29.23.

2. God's Sovereignty and Kingdom: The Kaddish emphasizes the establishment of God's kingdom: "May he establish his kingdom during your life and during your days." Exodus 15.18 declares, "The Lord shall reign forever and ever". The anticipation of God's rule is also a recurring theme in both the Psalms (e.g., Psalm 145.13) and in the prophetic writings (e.g., Daniel 7.14).

3. Eschatological Hope and Redemption: The Kaddish expresses hope for the ultimate fulfillment of God's plans and the renewal of the world as written in Habakkuk 2.14, "For the Earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." This echoes the prophetic visions of a redeemed creation found in Isaiah (e.g.65.17-25).

4. Communal Orientation: The Kaddish is a prayer recited communally and reflects collective responsibility in glorifying God. We can find the basis for this in 1 Chronicles 16.8, "Give thanks to

the Lord, call upon his name; make his deeds known among the peoples."

The Shema is derived from Deuteronomy 6.4-9, which begins: "Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might." It is the central affirmation of the Jewish faith that proclaims the unity of God and the call to love and serve him with one's whole being. This shapes the understanding of God, worship, and ethical living for not only Jews but for Christians as well.

The Shema affirms the unity of God, reflecting the covenant between God and Israel while highlighting his faithfulness and the response of his people in love and obedience. The command to love God with all of our being is a call for total devotion and for a holistic relationship. This relationship leads to the fulfillment of ethical obligations toward others, for the love of God cannot be separated from the love of others. Finally, we find hope for the future in it. The Shema is, at its core, a proclamation of God's ultimate reign over all creation. It is an invitation for people to live in hope for the fulfillment of God's purposes in history.

Dating back to the Second Temple era, The Amidah, also known as the Standing Prayer, is recited three times a day. It consists of a series of blessings, which encompass praise, petitions, and

thanksgiving. It contains deep theological, ethical, and eschatological concepts.

Having been very familiar with these prayers, as well as Torah and regular synagogue worship, they would have recognized these when hearing the core of Jesus' teachings. These Jews who came to the mountain to hear him preach were the members of society who had been marginalized or burdened by the religious and political structures of the time. With their understanding of the promises of God, this message spoke to their spiritual and practical concerns in a way that reached them deeply.

Jesus introduces his new prayer as both a continuation and a redefinition of Jewish prayer. Retaining the focus of the Jewish prayers, it reshapes them into a prayer of hope and a prayer of action for the universal kingdom of God, which breaks into the present through Jesus Christ.

We should also note here that most Jews saw him as a rabbi or perhaps even a prophet. His radical reinterpretation of the Law could resonate with hopes for renewal but could also be unsettling or confusing to them, for they commonly expected a more political or militaristic Messiah or deliverer. His teachings, although they hinted at his messianic mission, if taken by themselves, would not be sufficient for most Jews to recognize him as the promised Messiah (Christ in Greek).

Why A New Prayer?

Jesus' new prayer is set apart from the Kaddish, the Shema, and the Amidah by its radical and transformative response to the eschatological hope and relational vision of the kingdom of God. It reflects Jesus' unique mission to reshape humanity's relationship with God, with others, and with the world.

The Lord's Prayer is a proclamation of the Kingdom of God. This necessitated a new framework for prayer, one that emphasizes the now of God's reign and of its transformative power in the present life of humanity. It centers on God's name, God's kingdom, and on God's will, all of which are at the core of his teachings. Unlike the traditional Jewish prayers that are tied to covenantal obligations or liturgical contexts, the Lord's prayer is universal in scope designed for all. It unites humanity in a shared dependence on God, irrespective of ethnic or religious boundaries. In introducing God as "Our Father," he emphasizes intimacy and a communal identity rather than focusing solely on the covenantal God of Israel.

With this prayer, Jesus aims to emphasize direct access to God as a loving Father, bypassing the institutional and ritualistic systems of temple or synagogue. Believers are invited into a personal, trusting relationship with God, one rooted in grace rather than in the legalism of religion and ritual precision.

Although this prayer is new, it is not without similarities, as well as differences, with the *Shemoneh Esrei.* Like the Lord's Prayer, the Kaddish also sanctifies God's name and expresses hope for the establishment of God's kingdom. However, it is primarily tied to sanctification after studying, or after mourning. By contrast, Jesus' prayer goes further, linking the sanctification of God's name to ethical living and personal petitions, such as forgiveness and our daily bread. The Kaddish is indeed a reverent affirmation of God's transcendence, but Jesus' goes further to emphasize the immanence of God and the intimate relationship with believers as "Our Father."

The Amidah is a formalized liturgy with 19 blessings covering themes of praise, petition, and thanksgiving, The Lord's Prayer, on the other hand, is concise, focusing on essential elements of faith and daily life. This makes it accessible to everyone at all times, even outside of structured worship. The Amidah reflects a covenantal relationship between God and Israel, addressing national and religious concerns, while the new prayer transcends these boundaries, reflecting a vision of God's kingdom that is a global, all-inclusive reality.

The Shema is a dynamic declaration of God's oneness and of his sovereignty over all things. It is a foundational statement of faith, recited daily to

affirm one's allegiance to God. Jesus' prayer moves beyond a declaration to petition and action but calls for God's kingdom to be realized on earth now and to align one's self with divine purposes. While it emphasizes obedience to the commandments as a response to God's sovereignty, the Lord's prayer emphasizes trust in God as a loving Father, offering guidance for living in alignment with his will.

The Lord's Prayer's' features are distinctive. They directly anticipate the coming of God's kingdom and the transformative impact it has on Earth. It unites the present and future aspects of God's reign. The petitions for daily bread, for forgiveness, and for the deliverance from evil ground the prayer in the realities of human life, making it both spiritual and practical. Transcending national or religious exclusivity it creates a communal identity of believers. It is both concise and accessible, reflecting upon Jesus' critiques of vast expressions of words or the performances of prayer practices as found in Matthew 6.7.

The need for a new prayer is best summed up by Jesus himself as recorded in Revelation 21.5, "Behold, I am making all things new."

Why at this Time?

As we have discussed, both the Sermon on the Mount and the Lord's Prayer are deeply tied to

Jesus' role in inaugurating the Kingdom of God and addressing the existential and historical needs of his time. His teachings are eschatological in nature whereby announcing and embodying the coming reign of God while at the same time addressing the immediate context of suffering and oppression.

The sermon is preached during the Roman occupation when there was a Jewish expectation of liberation by a promised messiah. It was a time when people longed for hope and for guidance. The Sermon's timing, as one might expect from God, was perfect. It offered all of this with a transformative vision that transcended the power struggles of the time. The Lord's Prayer expresses the very core of the kingdom message with the particular plea, "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." The sermon and the prayer are milestones in the unfolding of God's redemptive plan.

These are not static teachings that lack movement, action, or change but ones that call for revolutionary acts that change the direction of humanity toward the future kingdom while also addressing the brokenness of the present.

This is a pivotal moment in human history when the world was ripe for the radical reimagining of relationships- with God, with others, and with creation itself.

For certain, Jesus' arrival was not dictated by external forces or human calculations but instead was a result of God's gracious decision to bring salvation into the world. Jesus' life and death mark the turning point of history because they reveal God's ultimate purpose: the redemption of creation and the hope of the new one. God has the freedom to act in history by his will alone at the right moment. Roman oppression and religious legalism certainly made Jesus' teaching resonate with the people, but this does not lead us to conclude that God was bound to act only at that time. God chose to act at that decisive moment to reveal his kingdom by his own will.

Misconceptions and Misuses

Over time, the Lord’s Prayer has been misinterpreted, toned down, and stripped of its radical implications. It is often reduced to a private, individual petition that focuses solely on personal piety and personal spiritual needs. The Lord’s Prayer, however, is a communal prayer rooted in the collective longing for God’s kingdom and the accompanying justice. The repeated use of “our” (e.g., “Our Father”, “our daily bread”) highlights this communal aspect that is often lost in modern interpretations.

The phrase “Your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven” is often spiritualized, referring only to an otherworldly

hope of a heaven. This reinforces a feeling of complacency in the service of the kingdom or of its call for the tangible transformation of the world in the here and now. The prayer is not one of escaping from this world but a revolutionary calling for God's justice and peace to break into history.

Rather than causing change, it has been used to uphold power structures or reinforce them. This misuse legitimizes political and religious authorities by interpreting " your kingdom come" as a call to submit to existing systems rather than to criticize them. This is most certainly a betrayal of the prayer's radical message, which envisions God's kingdom as the overthrowing of oppressive systems.

The line "Give us this day our daily bread" is sometimes spiritualized to refer to spiritual sustenance, ignoring its direct appeal for material provision and economic justice. This spiritualization overlooks the needs of the hungry and the prayer's implicit critique of systems that perpetuate inequality.

The petition "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" is often interpreted narrowly as personal forgiveness without addressing systemic sin or societal reconciliation. However, the forgiveness of the Lord's Prayer has communal and structural implications, challenging cycles of violence and injustice. The term "debts"

refers not merely to financial obligations but reflects the broader realities of sin, injustice, and broken relationships.

All of these developments and misconceptions are part of broader theological and historical trends. During the Enlightenment and the rise of individualism, Christianity increasingly emphasized personal salvation and private spirituality, sidelining the communal and eschatological aspects. This has led to a more self-focused reading of the Lord's Prayer, and as Christianity has become more intertwined with state power, the radical nature of the Lord's Prayer has been diluted. The mention of God's coming kingdom has been interpreted to align with earthly kingdoms rather than to challenge them.

Therefore, the prayer's emphasis on tangible realities (e.g., bread, justice, forgiveness) has been gradually overshadowed by allegorical and spiritualized interpretations, detaching it from its historical and social context. To recover the prayer's transformative potential, it needs to be used to rekindle hope for the coming of God's kingdom, not as a distant, future event but as a reality breaking into the present. The call for active participation in building a world of justice, peace, and reconciliation should thereby be renewed.

The communal language of the prayer challenges individualism and calls believers to

solidarity with the poor, the marginalized, and all of creation. “Our daily bread” demands a commitment to address global hunger and economic inequality. The petitions contained within, particularly ”Your kingdom come,” are a direct challenge to systems of oppression. Therefore, praying the Lord’s Prayer means aligning oneself with God’s mission of liberation and renewal.

The prayer’s focus on forgiveness demands that believers confront not only personal grievances but also systemic injustices.

2

KINGDOM OF GOD: UNITY OF HEAVEN AND EARTH

Kingdom of God

The concept of the Kingdom of God is deeply rooted in Jewish religious and cultural traditions. In Jewish thought, God is seen to be the ultimate king and ruler of all creation. This demonstrates his divine sovereignty, which will one day be fully acknowledged by all peoples (e.g. Psalm 47, Zechariah 14.9).

By the time of Jesus, many Jews held apocalyptic hopes based on Daniel's 70-week prophecy (Daniel 9.24-27). This prophecy said that God would intervene in history to defeat evil, restore Israel, and establish a reign of justice and peace. The 70 weeks (or seventy-sevens) mentioned in this were interpreted during the Second Temple period as a timeline leading to the arrival of the

Messiah, a period of 490 years. The period of the 70 weeks was said to have begun with King Artaxerxes of Persia when he made his decree to rebuild the temple in 457 (Ezra 7). A countdown of 490 years would have culminated in their present time.

The Messiah was expected to fulfill the prophecy by inaugurating God’s kingdom, defeating Israel’s enemies, and restoring justice and righteousness. Jesus proclaimed this inauguration of the kingdom at a time of heightened messianic and eschatological hopes. Daniel’s prophecy and Jesus’ ministry aligned with their expectations; however, Jesus redefined the role of the Messiah. Instead of a militaristic liberator or a political leader, Jesus revealed the Kingdom of God as a transformative and redemptive reign of grace inaugurated through his life, death, and resurrection.

Jesus made references to himself as the “Son of Man” (Daniel 7.13-14) which echoes the imagery in Daniel. It was a self-designation to emphasize his role in God's redemptive plan while drawing on an apocalyptic traditional figure that connected his mission to the eschatological figure who embodies divine authority, vindication, and the coming of God's kingdom mentioned by Daniel. This allowed Jesus to convey profound theological truths while remaining somewhat enigmatic to his audience. This linked his mission to the fulfillment of these apocalyptic hopes. However, he shifts the focus to

God’s universal salvation rather than the restoration of the nation. The Jewish rejection of Jesus as the Messiah mentioned in Daniel occurred because he did not meet their expectation of a conquering Messiah.

The Kingdom of God was anticipated as a future event, a time when God would overthrow oppressive powers such as the Roman Empire and vindicate his people. Jesus builds on this tradition but reinterprets it, emphasizing God’s kingdom as already breaking into the present.

The Jewish prophets (e.g., Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel) envisioned a time when God’s justice, mercy, and peace would reign. Isaiah’s vision of the “peaceable kingdom” (Isaiah 11) in particular is a significant influence where the Messiah would lead creation into harmony and shalom. Jesus’ proclamation reflects this prophetic tradition, particularly in its concern for justice, care for the poor, and the restoration of creation.

In 1 Samuel 7.12-16, God promises David that he will establish his throne forever through his offspring. This is echoed in Isaiah 9.6-7, Jeremiah 23.5-6, Ezekiel 37.24-25, and in the Psalms at 89.3. These promises combined with their historical experiences, such as the Maccabean Revolt, (Apocrypha at 1 and 2 Maccabees) reinforce this hope for a leader who would overthrow foreign oppressors and establish a theocratic kingdom. These expectations were

rooted in a desire for liberation and for national restoration. Therefore, the Jews expected a Messiah who would usher in the kingdom of God by liberating Israel and establishing God's rule. Jesus fulfills and redefines this expectation by presenting himself as the Messiah, not through political revolution but through self-sacrificial love and the invitation to participate in God's redemptive work.

For Jesus, the Kingdom of God is not a static realm or a geographical place but the active and living reign of God, breaking into the present to challenge human power structures, heal the broken, and liberate the oppressed. This reign is inaugurated in Jesus' ministry, where acts of healing, exorcism, and forgiveness serve as signs of God's rule coming near.

The kingdom is both a present reality demonstrated in Jesus' actions and teachings, and a future hope, pointing to the ultimate renewal of creation when God's rule is fully established. This dual aspect reflects the Jewish belief in an unfolding timeline, where God's intervention transforms history and brings it to its intended fulfillment.

In Jewish prophetic tradition, the kingdom involves the restoration of covenantal relationships between God, humanity, and creation. The kingdom calls for a radical reordering of society according to God's justice,

including care for the marginalized, inclusion of the outsider, and the reversal of oppressive systems.

The Kingdom of God points toward a future consummation where God's justice, peace, and reconciliation will be fully realized. This is the "not yet" dimension of it. The Christian hope looks forward to the ultimate renewal of creation, the defeat of death, and the restoration of all things. The foundation of that hope is the resurrection of Christ, a hope that history is moving toward God's promised future.

While the kingdom is future-oriented it is a present reality actively breaking into the world through Jesus' life, ministry, death, and resurrection. This is the "already" dimension of the kingdom. "The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God has come near" (Mark 1.15). This reflects the inbreaking of God's reign into human history, challenging structures of sin, oppression, and injustice.

Believers live in the tension between the "already" and the "not yet". While the kingdom is inaugurated through Christ, it is not yet fully realized. This tension motivates discipleship, as believers are called to participate in the mission of the kingdom by embodying its values- justice, peace, and love- in anticipation of its full realization. This active participation is a form of "proleptic" living, a way of living that involves

anticipation of future events, meaning that believers live in the present as a foretaste of the future kingdom.

Therefore, the future kingdom has implications for the present. The hope for God’s future reign empowers believers to confront injustice and work for liberation because the promise of the future gives meaning to present struggles.

We see this teaching at John 3:16 whereby faith opens a person to the transformative power of God’s love. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, that everyone who believes in him will not perish, but have eternal life" The eternal life promised to “everyone who believes” is a present reality experienced through participation in God’s kingdom in the here and now and in the hope for the future renewal of all creation. It means participating in the eternal life of the Kingdom of God here and now by embracing Christ as the means of eternal life. This is not just a future life but one that begins now for the believer. It is the faithful understanding that the kingdom has broken into the now and the experiencing of God's reign in the present. This calls a believer to participate in eternal life now with the values of the kingdom demonstrating a tangible commitment to living out God's redemptive purposes in the world today.

Heaven

Heaven and the Kingdom of God are distinct but related theological realities. In scripture, “heaven” is often depicted as the dwelling place of God (e.g., Psalm 11.4) and the realm from which divine power and blessings flow. It is closely associated with God’s sovereignty and the created cosmos (Genesis 1.1)

During the Second Temple period, heaven increasingly became a symbol of divine transcendence, perfection, and the hope of life after death, as seen in texts like Daniel and 1 Enoch. As Christian thought became more influenced by Greek philosophy (especially Platonism) it came to view heaven as a purely spiritual, otherworldly realm, separate from the material world. This dualistic view often overshadowed the biblical emphasis on the renewal of creation.

Heaven is often misunderstood as a static, disembodied afterlife where souls escape the material world. Such a view neglects the biblical vision of resurrection and the renewal of creation (Romans 8.19-21). Heaven is not the final goal of salvation but part of God’s plan to unite heaven and earth in a new creation (Revelation 21.1-3)

Knowledge of heaven is best viewed in light of the kingdom. It represents the closeness of God and the fullness of life under God’s reign, not a distant realm of escape. The ultimate hope is not escape to heaven but the union of heaven and

earth in the new creation, where God’s kingdom is fully realized (Revelation 21). Salvation is about the resurrection of the body and the renewal of creation, not the escape of the soul to heaven.

There are serious implications to this traditional view of heaven. We are to reject outright the Greek dualistic views that separate heaven and earth, spirit and body, or soul and creation. We are instead to have a holistic view of salvation. The Kingdom of God offers hope not just for individuals but for all creation, including the natural world. The focus shifts from the waiting for heaven to actively participating in God’s kingdom by working for justice, peace, and renewal in the present.

In the act of creation, in the self-emptying of himself (Kenosis), God created both Aeonic and Chronos time. Aeonic time is the eternal time of heaven. It refers to God’s eternal unbounded time that transcends human history. It is the time of heaven, God’s dwelling place- characterized by permanence, peace, and the fullness of life. Aeonic time is not linear but reflects the eternal “now” of God’s presence and activity. It is the time and dimension of God’s presence, as well as of the angelic beings.

It is also where believers are united with Christ immediately at their death, awaiting the resurrection and fulfillment of the new creation. Aeonic time, or heaven, is God's eternal and timeless reality, which transcends the linear,

chronological time that we experience. Believers are united with Christ here immediately upon their death because they enter God's eternal "now", where past, present, and future converge. With the final goal of history being the reconciliation of all things in Christ (Colossians 1.20) unbelievers would also exist here. Their experience will differ as they are estranged from Christ, most probably experiencing a process of reconciliation. To these, God's presence may be profoundly unsettling initially, but there can be no escaping the truth of their choices and the rejection of grace becoming realized. This, of course, would not be about punishment but about natural consequences and a process of reconciliation.

Chronos time refers to the linear, temporal flow of human history on Earth. It is marked by change, decay, and the limitations of mortality. It is the context of human life, struggle, and the unfolding of redemptive history.

This is part of his purposeful engagement with creation, allowing for dynamic relationships, growth, and the unfolding of his redemptive plan. Chronos time is essential for human existence because it provides a framework for freedom, moral decision-making, and meaningful experiences. It allows for a genuine relationship between God and humanity, enabling humans to respond to God's love freely over time.

Chronos time also serves as a realm that is distinct from God's eternal and divine reality. Humanity, being finite and non-divine, is not naturally capable of dwelling fully in the direct presence of the divine nature of God. It allows for a world in which humans can live, grow, and develop within the limits of change and mortality. It allows for the framework for humanity to be transformed and prepared for eventual communion with God by the redemptive work of Jesus Christ.

Salvation is not merely about existing in aeonic time but rather the ultimate union of heaven and earth, where all creation is transformed and God’s presence is fully realized in the Kingdom of God. God will dwell here on earth with humanity (Revelation 21.1-3) as God comes to us, we do not go to him.

Kingdom of Christ

The Kingdom of Jesus is a theologically distinct concept from, but deeply connected to, the Kingdom of God. Although not explicitly mentioned in scripture, it is also not referred to as a separate entity from the Kingdom of God. Regardless, the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus as the inauguration of God’s kingdom through Jesus’ unique role as the Messiah is clear. Passages such as John 18.36 (“My kingdom is not of this world”) and Matthew 28.18 (All authority in heaven and on

earth has been given to me") point to Jesus' kingship within the framework of God's kingdom.

Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God (e.g., Mark 1.15) is central to his ministry. He not only announced the kingdom but embodied it in his life, actions, and teachings, demonstrating God's reign through healing, inclusion, and love.

The Kingdom of Jesus refers to the concrete manifestation of God's reign through his life, death, and resurrection. It is Christ-centered, focusing on Jesus' unique role in initiating and embodying the Kingdom of God. Unlike earthly kingdoms based on power and dominance, the Kingdom of Jesus reflects humility, service, and sacrificial love as exemplified in the washing of the feet of the disciples (John 13) and his ultimate sacrifice on the cross.

The Kingdom of Jesus is a means to the Kingdom of God. The two can be distinguished by describing the Kingdom of Jesus as the historical, Christ-centered realization of the broader, eternal Kingdom of God.

The Kingdom of God is universal, cosmic, and eschatological. It encompasses all creation and reflects God's ultimate reign. On the other hand, the Kingdom of Jesus is specific and historical. It emerges in Jesus' ministry and is the way God's eternal kingdom enters human history. The Kingdom of Jesus centers on Christ as the mediator and the redeemer. The Kingdom of God

is centered on God’s ultimate reign, which Jesus inaugurates and will deliver to God at the eschatological consummation (1 Corinthians 15.24-28).

Initially, the Kingdom of Jesus had been a source of hope for the oppressed and marginalized. Jesus’ examples have inspired believers to work for movements for justice and liberation toward a world that reflects God’s justice and peace. Contrarily, since the Constantinian era, the Kingdom of Jesus has been conflated with political and institutional power. The church aligned itself with the empire marking a significant departure from Jesus’ original vision of a humble servant-based kingdom. The church’s identification with imperial power has turned the Kingdom of Jesus into a tool for domination rather than service.

Interpretations of the Kingdom of Jesus that reduce it to an inward, spiritual reality detached from the social and political dimensions of life diminish its transformative and liberating power in the world. Some interpretations are used to justify exclusionary practices, where certain groups claim exclusive access to Jesus’ kingdom while marginalizing others, contrary to the inclusive nature of Jesus’ ministry. For some, it is seen solely as a future reality, which can lead to complacency and inaction in addressing injustice in the present.

In reality, the Kingdom of Jesus is fundamentally rooted in the cross, which demonstrates God’s power through weakness and love. This subverts traditional notions of kingship and power. It calls believers to active participation in God’s redemptive work, both spiritually and socially. The church is to embody the kingdom by following Jesus’ example of love, justice, and reconciliation. It is not an end in itself but points to and participates in the universal Kingdom of God, where all things will be reconciled and renewed.

It is important to not take the millennial reign of Christ mentioned in Rvelation 20.16 as a literal 1000 years, but instead as a theological vision of hope. It represents the victory of Christ, the transformative work of the Spirit, and the anticipation of God's ultimate renewal of heaven and earth. The millennium is a call to active hope-participating in God's kingdom now while looking forward to its future realization.

Heaven and Earth United

The uniting of heaven and earth is a central theme of theology, as it is the ultimate fulfillment of God’s redemptive plan for all creation. It is the realization of God’s kingdom. This idea draws heavily from biblical imagery, particularly Revelation 21.1-3, where the new heaven and the

new earth are described, and God is said to dwell with humanity.

Creation and redemption are both part of a single divine purpose. The union of heaven and earth is the culmination of these, where all things are brought into harmony with God's will and presence. This unity is not a destruction of creation but its fulfillment and transformation. It represents the final realization of the Kingdom of God. It is not merely about individual salvation, but the renewal of all creation where God's glory is fully manifest.

As we have discussed earlier, heaven is not just a distant, ethereal realm, but the sphere of God's immediate presence and divine glory, untouched by corruption or death. Earth is the sphere of human and natural life, bound by chronological time, decay, and suffering. It is the place of God's immanence, where God interacts with creation but is not yet fully revealed in glory.

The uniting of heaven and earth signifies the end of the division between God's transcendent glory and the created world. In this union, God's presence becomes fully immanent, transforming creation into a space of eternal life and divine communion. This is the new creation, where heaven and earth are no longer separate. This is not a replacement of the old creation but its renewal. Material existence and spiritual existence are reconciled and brought into harmony. This is

reflected in the Lord’s prayer petition, “Your will be done on earth as it is heaven”.

The resurrection of Christ is the foretaste and guarantee of this unification. Christ’s risen body is both physical and glorified, a sign of the future reality where heaven and earth are integrated. This union offers hope not just for individuals but for the cosmos. When they are united humanity will live fully in God’s presence, made capable of dwelling with God’s glory, a process made possible with resurrection and reconciliation, the work of Jesus Christ.

The idea of the uniting of heaven and earth is not just found in Christian eschatological tradition as it has deep roots in Jewish thought and theology as well. In Jewish theology, heaven (shamayim) and earth (eretz) are often viewed as two interconnected realms created by God, distinct but separate. Heaven is understood as the divine realm or dwelling place of God, while Earth is the sphere of human and natural life. Jewish eschatology, too, anticipates a future restoration of creation where God’s presence will permeate the world. This expectation is closely related to the concept of “tikkun olam” (repair of the world).

We can see where the prophets of Israel frequently spoke of a divine harmony where heaven and earth are united. Tradition has it that the Temple in Jerusalem was considered to be the physical meeting place where God’s presence

(Shekinah) dwelled among the people. The tearing of the veil at the Holy of Holies at the time of Jesus' death (described at Matthew 27.51) is a profound symbol of the uniting of the two.

This veil signifies the separation between God and humanity due to sin, mortality, and the limitations of the created world. Its tearing was a cosmic event signaling the removal of this separation; an act of reconciliation. Through Christ's death, the barriers created by sin and death are broken, opening the way into God's presence.

On the cross, God in Christ experiences the deepest separation from himself (through suffering and death) to reconcile and unite heaven and earth. "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15.34) is an expression of the profound depth of Jesus' solidarity with human sin and suffering, and of separation from God. It is through this abandonment that God's plan for redemption is fulfilled. The cry of Jesus not only expresses the agony of separation from God but of its reconciliation, uniting heaven and earth. The destruction of the Temple in AD 70 led to the hope for a future where God would permanently dwell among humanity.

Unfortunately, modern Christianity has lost this and often teaches the idea that heaven is an escape from earth or that the material world is inherently evil. This comes from the

Greek/Platonist idea of dualism and has no place in the teachings and ministry of Christ. This idea is not holistic and does not encompass both the spiritual and physical dimensions of existence.

The Fallacy of Escapism

Escapism in theology reflects an attempt to "escape" from earthly life by retreating into a focus on otherworldly or spiritual concerns. It tends to focus on spiritual or heavenly realities to avoid engagement with the challenges and responsibilities of the present world. It often emphasizes personal salvation, or the afterlife, at the expense of addressing social, political, and ecological issues,

It is a fallacy rooted in a misunderstanding of eschatology, the study of the "end times." In its focus on the otherworldly, it neglects the transformative power of hope in the present world. It falsely teaches that salvation is about fleeing the world rather than redeeming it. Escapism also overlooks God's commitment to creation, as expressed in the doctrine of the resurrection, which affirms the renewal of the world rather than its abandonment.

We can identify early Christian tendencies that were influenced by Greek philosophy that introduced a dualism between the spiritual and material realms. These dualisms encouraged viewing the material world as inferior, promoting

withdrawal into the “heavenly” or “spiritual” as the true goal of salvation. Practices such as asceticism and monastic withdrawal, while valuable in some respects, also perpetuated a sense of fleeing the world rather than engaging with its problems. Certain strands of Protestant theology, especially in dispensationalism, promote a “rapture theology” that views the ultimate goal of the Christian life as escaping the world before its destruction.

There is a modern echo of Gnostic thought in this, where salvation is equated with acquiring secret knowledge or escaping the confines of the material world. The focus on personal autonomy and salvation can lead to the neglect of communal and societal responsibilities, fostering a privatized faith disconnected from broader realities.

We can trace the rise of escapist thought to moments in history when the church sought refuge from external pressures. Early Christians often retreated into apocalyptic hope, imagining the imminent return of Christ and neglecting societal engagement. When Christianity became institutionalized, its eschatological vision shifted from transforming society to preserving its power. This created a disconnect between faith and lived reality. The rise of secularism and industrialization led to a privatized faith that often abandoned the social and political dimensions of the Gospel.

Certain strands of fundamentalism and dispensationalist theology, particularly in American evangelicalism, promote a rapture-focused eschatology that detaches Christians from social and ecological responsibility. Churches that emphasize personal piety over societal transformation also contribute to an escapist mentality.

Governments or political leaders sometimes use this as a religion to pacify people, urging them to await a heavenly reward rather than resist injustice on earth.

There are individual repercussions to this ideology. Believers become passive, awaiting divine intervention rather than taking responsibility for change. Escapism can lead to a sense of detachment from the world and its struggles, fostering a shallow faith.

There are also societal repercussions to escapist theology which can justify inaction in the face of systemic oppression, ecological destruction, and inequality. By focusing solely on spiritual matters, escapist Christians may inadvertently support oppressive systems by failing to resist them. Escapist theologies also miss the importance of creation care, viewing the world as a temporary stage destined for destruction.

Believers are called to a vision rooted in the eschaton as the fulfillment of history, not its abandonment. Christian hope should inspire

believers to engage with the world, working towards justice, peace, and ecological healing. The resurrection is a promise of God’s ultimate commitment to creation, not its destruction.

Finally, the Kingdom of God is a present and future reality that challenges us to embody its values in the here and now, participating in the coming kingdom. Escapism is a betrayal of the gospel’s call to engage creation, fight for justice, and work toward the renewal of all things.

3

ESCHATOLOGY:
A FUTURE AND PRESENT REALTY

From the Greek eskhatos, meaning last, eschatology is the study of the end times. Eschatology is a future and present reality because of God's kingdom's "already but not yet" nature. Through Jesus Christ's life, death, and resurrection, the Kingdom of God has already broken into the world, offering redemption, hope, and transformation in the present.

At the same time, the fullness of this kingdom- where all creation is renewed and justice and peace reign- is a future promise yet to be realized.

Already Here, A Present Reality

The "already here" aspect of the kingdom refers to the in-breaking of God's kingdom into the present world through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit.

The coming of Jesus marked the inauguration of God's kingdom on earth. Through his teachings, miracles, and actions, Christ revealed what the reign of God looks like. It is a reign of healing, justice, reconciliation, and the defeat of sin and death.

The resurrection is particularly significant because it signals that the new creation has already begun. In Christ, the future hope of renewal and eternal life has broken into the present world.

The third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit continues to bring the reality of the kingdom into the lives of believers and the world. Through the Spirit's guidance, believers experience the transformative power of God's future promises in their lives today. This includes personal transformation, the pursuit of justice, and communal expressions of love and peace.

The "already here" is visible in the acts of faith, hope, and love that anticipate and reflect the future restoration of all things. Every act of healing, justice, and reconciliation in the present points to the ultimate fulfillment of God's promises.

Hope is not passive waiting but an active, present force that shapes how believers live. The future reality of God's kingdom empowers believers to live in anticipation of that future now, embodying its values in their daily lives.

Role of the Holy Spirit

God, through both the Father and the Son, sent the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2.1-13) as part of the ongoing work of redemption. This is to make the presence and power of God active in the lives

of believers. The Spirit empowers believers to embody the Kingdom of God, spread the gospel of the kingdom, and live in alignment with God's will. The Spirit also sustains the church as the body of Christ in the world.

The Spirit makes God's future kingdom present in the here and now by bringing the resurrection life of Christ into the lives of believers, enabling them to experience and reflect God's transformative power today.

The Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son (Filioque), but in a way that reflects the dynamic relationships within the Trinity. The Spirit is sent by the Father through the Son, and this sending reveals the cooperative love and unity within the Godhead. This shared sending underscores the Spirit's role in drawing believers into the communal life of the Trinity.

The Spirit was sent to empower believers with hope for the future and strength to live faithfully in the present. The Spirit enables transformation, both individually and communally, pointing toward the ultimate renewal of creation.

Not Yet, A Future Reality

Eschatology as a future reality refers to the ultimate fulfillment of God's promises in the restoration and renewal of all creation, which will come to completion at the end of history. This future-oriented hope is central to theology,

shaping how believers understand the world and live in anticipation of what is to come.

This eschatological future is the transformation of heaven and earth when heaven and earth will be united. In this reality, God will dwell fully with humanity, all suffering and death will be abolished, and creation will be liberated from its bondage to decay (Romans 8.21). It is about the Creator's original intentions for life, peace, and justice are fully realized.

A central aspect of this future reality is the resurrection of the body, where believers are raised to eternal life in glorified bodies, sharing in the victory of Christ over death. This affirms God's commitment to both the physical and spiritual dimensions of human existence.

The resurrection also signals the ultimate defeat of death, sin, and evil, ensuring that nothing is lost but everything is redeemed and made new.

While the Kingdom of God is already inaugurated in Christ, its complete realization lies in the future. This will be a time when God's justice, peace, and righteousness prevail universally, bringing an end to oppression, violence, and injustice. The future kingdom is eschatological, meaning it represents the fulfillment of history and the ultimate goal toward which creation moves.

Eschatology as a future reality includes the final judgment, where God sets all things right. This judgment is not only about punishment but also

about restoring justice, vindicating the oppressed, and purging the world of evil. Judgment is part of God's redemptive plan, ensuring that love and righteousness triumph.

The final judgment will aim to purge the world of evil, sin, and suffering.

While the concept of punishment might still exist in some form, it is understood more as a corrective, or a purifying judgment rather than a vindictive eternal damnation. God's love is not a passive force but an active agent of transformation. Even those who have turned away from God are subject to reconciliation and this purifying judgment. Being reminded of the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15.11-32), all will be drawn back into God's loving embrace. The Final Judgment is made, and God rules in our favor, not against us.

Revelation 21

The Book of Revelation, particularly chapter 21 verses 1-6, offers a vision of God's ultimate plan for the world- a new heaven and a new earth, and the new Jerusalem- where God's justice, peace, and reconciliation are fully realized. These passages encapsulate the culmination of eschatological hope and the transformation of all things.

Verse 1: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea."

The new heaven and the new earth is the fulfillment of God's redemptive plan for the entire cosmos. The 'new heaven and new earth" signify the renewal and restoration of all creation, not its destruction. It's a promise of hope where the brokenness of the present world is made whole. The cosmic scope of salvation is vital for a theology of hope; salvation is not just for individuals, but for all of creation.

"First heaven and first earth had passed away" refers to the current state of creation, marked by decay, sin, and suffering, is passing away. This indicates God's act of transformation, where all the consequences of sin- violence, injustice, death- are undone. This is not a negation of creation, but rather its fulfillment and perfection in God's final act.

"There was no longer any sea". The sea is often used as a symbol of chaos and disorder in biblical imagery. The absence of the sea indicates the end of chaos where God's rule is fully established, and there is no more space for the forces of evil, suffering, and disorder.

Verse 2: "And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."

"New Jerusalem". This city represents the ultimate community of god's people- a place of perfect fellowship and union with God. This is the fulfillment of God's promise to dwell with his people, a city where God's presence is fully realized. It is the embodiment of God's justice, peace, and restoration, marking the final reunification of heaven and earth.

"Coming down out of heaven from God"; The new Jerusalem descends from God, which emphasizes that salvation is God's gift, not a human creation. It shows that God is the initiator of all things in the eschaton, and the heavenly reality is made present on earth, bringing heaven and earth into perfect unity.

"Prepared as a bride adorned for her husband": The image of the bride is rich in biblical theology, symbolizing the intimate union between god and his people. This is the ultimate expression of God's love for creation- a relationship where the brokenness of the past is completely healed, and humanity is presented to God as pure and reconciled. The brides adornment speaks of the restorative work of God in making humanity and creation whole.

Verse 3: "And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is among the people, and he will dwell among them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be among them"

"God's dwelling place is now among the people" is the central theme of God's presence with his people being realized. This is the culmination of the incarnation of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit, as God is no longer distant or transcendent but fully present with his people in a renewed and intimate relationship.

"He will dwell with them" speaks to the new creation in which God fully inhabits his world. The separation between heaven and earth is no more. This new reality is one where God is Emmanuel, "God with us", eternally and in full communion with humanity.

"They will be his people, and God himself will be with them" proclaims that the ultimate relationship of covenant is realized. This is a mutual relationship, with humanity fully reconciled to God and aligned with God's will, reflecting the full restoration of communion with the Creator.

Verse 4: "And he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away"

"He will wipe away every tear from their eyes" is a profound image of God's compassion and healing touch. This represents the complete erasure of suffering and sorrow in the new creation. God's redemptive love heals all the wounds of the past and wipes away the scars of sin.

"No more death or mourning or crying or pain" points to the ultimate defeat of death and the eradication of all forms of suffering. Death and pain are the results of sin, and here they are abolished in the final fulfillment of God's kingdom. This is a vision of complete renewal where suffering is no longer part of the human experience.

"The first things have passed away". The first things that were marked by sin, decay, and death are no more. The present world, with all its brokenness and alienation, is transformed. This is the inauguration of the new age, where God's eternal reign is established.

Verse 5: "And he who sits on the throne said, 'Behold, I am making all things new!'. And he said, 'Write, for these words are faithful and true'."

"I am making all things new!" This is God's declaration of the cosmic renewal that is taking place. This is not merely a return to a former state but a transformation of the entire cosmos into something new and glorious. The new creation is not a replacement but a restoration and fulfillment of God's original intent.

"These words are faithful and true". God's promises are reliable and certain. This speaks to the unshakable hope that believers have in God's eschatological promises. The faithfulness of God's word ensures that this vision will come to fruition, despite the current suffering and chaos.

Verse 6: "Then he said to me, 'It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give water to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life, without cost."

"It is done" is the proclamation that marks the completion of God's redemptive work. The struggle is over, and God's purposes have been accomplished. This is a reminder that God is the finisher of his work- everything will come to completion according to God's perfect will.

"I am the Alpha and the Omega." God's eternal nature is affirmed here. From the beginning of time (Alpha) to its fulfillment (Omega), God is the beginning and end of all things. This underscores the cosmic scope of God's plan and his sovereignty over all creation.

"I will give water to the one who thirsts" This represents God's provision and sustenance for all who long for renewal. The water of life is symbolic of the Spirit and the eternal life that God offers. This reflects God's generosity and grace that reaches out to all who are spiritually thirsty, offering them the fullness of life.

Misinterpretations of Revelation 21: These most often stem from reducing the cosmic and transformative vision of the text to overly narrow, individualistic, or escapist frameworks. A gross error is the interpretation of the" new heaven and new earth" as God annihilating the current creation and starting over. This fosters an attitude

of disregard for the environment and the material world as if the present creation is disposable or irrelevant. Misreading this text as destruction undermines the theological importance of caring for the earth and living as stewards of creation in the here and now.

Some focus exclusively on the personal benefits of salvation- seeing Revelation 21 as a promise of individual escape to a heavenly paradise. Others read it as a promise of a heavenly escape from earthly suffering and view the Kingdom of God as a purely future reality, disconnected from the present.

Revelation 21 is also used to justify an exclusionary theology whereby only a select group is granted access to the new creation- or as a triumphalist vision where God crushes all enemies in a vindictive manner. These deny the presence and transcendence of God in creation in the present, seeing it only as a future reality.

The implications of all of these culminate in the justification of a hands-off approach to the present world, reasoning that if God will eventually make everything new, there is no need to address current problems like social injustice, environmental crises, or human suffering. With this, we miss the present responsibility of believers to actively participate in the breaking in of God's kingdom in the present and of God's call to mission.

4
MISSION: A CALL TO ACTION

A Faithful Call to Action

The phrase "on Earth as it is in heaven" in the Lord's Prayer is a profound call to action. Here, Jesus invites his followers to actively participate in bringing the values, morals, and transformative realities of the Kingdom of God into the present world.

This petition is not merely a hope for the future or a plea for divine intervention but a radical summons for believers to collaborate with God in realizing his will in the here and now. When Jesus instructs his followers to pray for God's will to be done "on earth as it is in heaven", he reveals that the Kingdom is not confined to a distant, heavenly realm. Instead, it is a reality that believers are called to embody now while anticipating its full consummation in the future.

Heaven represents the perfect order of God's justice, peace, and love. It is the realm where God's will is fully realized. Praying for God's will on earth is a call to bridge the gap between heaven and earth, aligning human life, society, and creation with the principles of God's kingdom.

The Lord's Prayer is not a passive hope for God to intervene; it is a call to participate in God's

redemptive mission. Believers, empowered by the Holy Spirit are called to work for these values. Following Jesus means participating in his mission to heal the sick, feed the hungry, liberate the oppressed, and bring hope to the hopeless. These are tangible expressions of God's will on earth.

Jesus himself embodied God's will through his life, death, and resurrection. Believers are called to follow his example, bringing the kingdom into their relationships, communities, and systems of power.

There are specific areas where believers can work to bring these about. The Kingdom of God is marked by justice- restoring what is broken and ensuring that the marginalized and oppressed are treated with dignity. Believers are called to advocate for the poor, oppressed, and excluded. They are to challenge unjust systems and structures that perpetuate inequality and suffering.

Reconciliation is central to the Gospel. Believers are called to be peacemakers, working to heal divisions and promote forgiveness from personal relationships to global conflicts.

It is important that we emphasize the cosmic scope of God's kingdom, which includes the renewal of creation. Believers are called to care for the environment as stewards of God's creation, combating ecological destruction, and working toward sustainability.

We must note that the ability to bring the kingdom to earth is not based on human strength or effort alone but is made possible by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit empowers believers to live out kingdom values, even in the face of opposition, suffering, or systemic brokenness. Through the Spirit, believers experience a foretaste of heaven and are equipped to bring that foretaste into their daily lives.

The Church

"The Church" is the universal body of Christ, transcending denominational boundaries and individual institutions. It embodies all churches collectively as a community of believers united by the Holy Spirit. It is not limited to its structures but is a living, dynamic expression of the Kingdom of God. It exists to make the Kingdom of God visible on earth. This means participating in God's mission of justice, peace, and reconciliation. Those that fail in this mission- by aligning with oppressive power structures- become disconnected from their divine calling.

The Church should oppose imperialism and systems of domination. It should not serve as a tool for maintaining the status quo but as a prophetic witness to God's new reality. Churches are called to imitate Christ, who sided with the marginalized and challenged the religious and political elites of his day.

When Churches align with imperial power, they often become complicit in injustice by supporting political, economic, or cultural systems that exploit the vulnerable. For example, churches that defend authoritarian regimes, perpetuate colonialism, or ignore systemic poverty and racism fail to reflect God's liberating kingdom.

Churches that prioritize institutional growth, wealth, or political influence over their prophetic mission lose sight of the cross, which calls for humility and self-giving love. The idolization of power turns the Church into a mere instrument of human ambition rather than a vessel of divine hope.

When churches side with the powerful instead of advocating for the poor, oppressed, and marginalized, they lose their credibility as witnesses to Christ's love and justice. God's kingdom is for the least and the lost, and the Church must reflect this preferential option for the poor.

Churches that prioritize their own survival become stagnant and fail to embody the Spirit-led dynamism of God's kingdom. Institutions that emphasize rules, dogmas, and hierarchy over relationships, inclusion, and grace often create barriers to God's presence instead of opening doors.

The Church, even in its brokenness, can be renewed by returning to its roots in Christ and the

Spirit. They must repent and reform to become authentic witnesses to the kingdom. Churches must acknowledge their complicity in systems of oppression and seek repentance. Self-critique is essential for avoiding the corruption of power and returning to the radical vision of the Gospel. It is called to be a prophetic community, speaking truth to power and challenging injustice, even when it comes at great cost. This requires siding with the marginalized, denouncing exploitation, and advocating for systemic change in line with God's will.

Churches claiming to follow Christ but embodying oppressive power structures, supporting imperialism, or following false eschatologies are betraying their calling as witnesses to the Kingdom of God. The true church is defined not by its name or institutional affiliation but by its active participation in God's mission of justice, peace, and renewal. For these, there is a great need for a prophetic critique. This means calling them to repentance, exposing their failures to embody the gospel, and urging them to realign with Christ's mission.

The Church is always, and at best, a broken community, yet remains a place where God works to bring about his kingdom. The task is to challenge churches that have strayed from this mission, not to condemn them, but to call them back to faithfulness to the kingdom. Those that do

not, or cannot be called back are false expressions of the Church; counterfeit churches, if you will. These are misrepresentations of the Church’s calling as they themselves are aligned with systems of oppression, imperialism, and false eschatologies. It is important to recognize that although they are not authentically reflecting the kingdom, they are still part of the larger historical and eschatological process of God working within his church.

Ecumenism

Ecumenism is a central aspect of the mission of the Church and its role in the unfolding of the kingdom. It is deeply theological, rooted in God's reconciliation of all creation. It is driven by hope, unity, and the transformative power of the Gospel.

Ecumenism is a foretaste of the ultimate reconciliation and renewal of all creation. The ecumenical movement is a concrete expression of this kingdom because it seeks to overcome the divisions within the Body of Christ. By fostering unity among Christians, the Church can reflect the unity of God's purpose for humanity and creation. The Church's diversity is a gift, but disunity is a scandal that contradicts the Gospel. Ecumenism is not about uniformity but about a deeper communion in Christ.

The Church is to be the proclaimer and anticipator of the kingdom. Disunity hampers the

Church's mission, while ecumenism strengthens its credibility and witness to the world. Its task is to bear witness to God's reconciliation in its own life. This is not optional but essential to the Church's identity.

Trinitarian theology profoundly shapes ecumenism. The unity and relationality of the Triune God as the model for human relationships and the Church. Just as the Father, Son, and Spirit exist in loving communion, so too the Church is called to a unity that embraces diversity and fosters mutual love and respect.

Ecumenism requires genuine dialogue among Christians of different traditions, grounded in humility and mutual respect. This involves listening to one another's theological insights, practices, and experiences to deepen understanding and enrich the whole Body of Christ.

This is not just about theological conversations but also about joint action in the world. Christians must work together for kingdom values as a unified witness to the Kingdom of God. Shared service to the world strengthens unity and reflects the Church's true purpose.

Divisions in the Church most often stem from historical, political, and cultural factors. Ecumenism involves a commitment to repentance, healing, and learning from these past mistakes to move toward reconciliation. It is not merely about

restoring past unity but also looking forward to the future God is bringing. It is rooted in eschatological hope in the expectation that all divisions will be healed. A forward-looking perspective fuels the Church to a commitment to unity.

Christian disunity weakens the Church's ability to bear credible witness to the Gospel; When Christians are united, they can present a powerful testimony of reconciliation and hope in a divided world. Ecumenism serves as a sign and instrument of God's reconciling work in the world. It demonstrates that reconciliation is not just a theological concept but a lived reality. It is not an end in itself but part of the Church's participation in God's mission to bring healing and renewal to all creation. It aligns the Church with God's purpose of restoring relationships- human to human, human to creation, and human to God.

The Kingdom of God is characterized by unity in diversity. Ecumenism anticipates this reality by bringing together different Christian traditions in a way that honors their distinctiveness while fostering communion. It is about the reconciliation of all things, therefore, when Christians work toward healing their divisions, they embody the kingdom's values and demonstrate the power of the Gospel to transform relationships. A united Church can better address global challenges like poverty, injustice, and environmental crises.

Ecumenism equips the Church to serve as a unified agent of the kingdom's transformative work in the world.

The Church is to be challenged to move beyond denominational boundaries and see themselves as part of the larger Body of Christ. It is to be warned against complacency or exclusivism that prioritizes institutional survival over the unity of the Church. The Church is most faithful to its calling when it embodies the hope of the kingdom through unity, justice, and love.

Therefore, ecumenism is a vital expression of the Kingdom of God. It works through dialogue, shared action, and hope, aiming to reconcile divisions and demonstrate the transformative power of God's love. It is not a secondary concern but a central aspect of the Church's mission and identity.

Not All Churches

It is also important to recognize that not all churches, communities, or denominations embody the values of the kingdom. Critical discernment is necessary as not every "church" aligns itself with the radical justice, reconciliation, and hope that the kingdom demands.

Churches that align themselves too closely with political, economic, or cultural power structures should be avoided. These often betray the Gospel by prioritizing institutional survival, comfort, or

influence over the kingdom values. We should also oppose any "church" that fosters division, sectarianism, or self-righteousness. Such "churches" undermine the unity and reconciliation central to the kingdom.

These "churches" that focus solely on individual salvation or the afterlife, neglecting issues of justice, peace, and care for the poor, miss the kingdom's present reality. A "church: that fails to engage with the world's suffering and injustice cannot be faithful to its calling.

It can be difficult to find a church that fully lives out the kingdom's values. Many fall short because of cultural blind spots, institutional inertia, or fear of addressing controversial issues. However, believers should remain hopeful and committed to seeking communities that at least strive toward embodying the kingdom's vision.

Believers are encouraged to seek kingdom-oriented churches that focus on justice, reconciliation, and hope. It should be engaged with the kingdom issues of justice, racial reconciliation, economic equity, and environmental care, reflecting holistic renewal. A believer's church should prioritize the inclusion and empowerment of the marginalized and oppressed. A church of the kingdom turns worldly hierarchies upside down.

A faithful church participates in God's work of renewing creation, proclaiming good news to the

poor, healing the brokenhearted, and freeing the oppressed. (Luke 4:18-19). It places the crucified and risen Christ at the center of its life and message. The cross is the ultimate measure of faithfulness, calling the Church to humility, self-giving, and solidarity with suffering.

Approaching the challenges of finding these churches should be done with a spirit of hope and creativity. Even if a local church falls short, believers can often find smaller groups within or outside the church that are working toward kingdom goals. Believers should not passively accept shortcomings but lovingly challenge their communities to live more fully in the kingdom work.

If no church embodies the kingdom, believers might consider starting or joining small communities focused on living out the Gospel in practical and radical ways.

Human Responsibility

Human responsibility in God's divine call to action is rooted in the concept of active participation in God's mission to bring about the Kingdom of God "on earth as it is in heaven." God's call is not merely a future promise but an invitation to cooperate with the divine work of healing, justice, and renewal in the here and now. This requires humans to live as co-creators and collaborators with God, reflecting his transformative love in

their actions and communities. The Church and individual believers are called to embody the realities of the kingdom in their lives. Believers are to be visible signs of God's presence and anticipatory agents of the future reconciliation of all things.

Following the example of Jesus, human responsibility involves solidarity with the marginalized and oppressed. This means actively challenging the systems that perpetuate these. Eschatological hope is not passive waiting but a driving force for engagement. Humans are responsible for making this hope tangible by addressing suffering, building peace, and creating structures that align with God's redemptive purposes.

Care for creation is a critical aspect of human responsibility. Ecological justice is part of God's wider plan for the renewal of the earth, urging humanity to protect and restore the natural world as stewards of creation.

Human responsibility is enabled by the Holy Spirit, who empowers individuals and communities to live out God's purposes. The Spirit inspires courage, creativity, and the capacity to act in ways that align with the divine will. By this believers must resist the pull of imperialism, nationalism, and other powers that oppose God's kingdom. Human responsibility includes critiquing

and dismantling these forces to make room for God’s justice.

God’s call is not an individualistic endeavor. The responsibility is shared by the entire community of believers. These must act collectively to model the unity, inclusiveness, and mutual care that characterizes the kingdom. It is a dynamic partnership with God in the unfolding of his redemptive purposes. Believers have the responsibility to answer the call to be active agents of change, empowered by the Spirit.

Social Implications

"On Earth as it is in heaven” has profound social implications when taken as a call to action for believers. It invites a commitment to align earthy realities with the values of heaven. The prayer suggests an active role in creating a society where systemic injustice, oppression, and inequality are dismantled. Believers may feel compelled to advocate for marginalized communities, challenge unfair laws, and work toward equitable distribution of resources.

In heaven, relationships are reconciled and whole. On earth, this translates to fostering forgiveness, reconciliation, and mutual respect in divided communities. This may involve mediating conflicts, building bridges across divides, and modeling a culture of peace. As heaven reflects God’s care for all creation, believers might be

moved to show compassion to the poor, sick, and vulnerable. This could involve engaging in acts of service, supporting healthcare initiatives, or addressing homelessness and hunger.

Heaven embodies harmony with God's creation, which inspires believers to care for the earth. This includes sustainable living, advocacy for environmental policies, and stewardship of natural resources.

The prayer envisions the values of God's kingdom- truth, goodness, and beauty- shaping societal norms and institutions. Believers might work to influence art, education, politics, and media to reflect these values. The Kingdom of God subverts earthly power dynamics by elevating the meek, the poor in spirit, and the peacemakers. On earth, this calls believers to challenge systems of exploitation and abuse. This might invite speaking truth to power, advocating for ethical leadership, and empowering the disenfranchised.

By living according to heavenly principles believers offer a countercultural vision of society. This includes practices of generosity, hospitality, and humility that resist materialism and self-centeredness.

In essence, the prayer is not just a petition but a declaration of intent, calling believers to be agents of God's transformative work in society, making faith a catalyst for meaningful social change.

Political Implications

The political implications of a believer embracing the call to action found in the Lord's Prayer are profound, as the phrase expresses a vision of God's kingdom breaking into earthly realities. When applied politically, it challenges existing structures, norms, and policies, calling for transformative engagement with society.

The kingdom represents perfect justice and equity. Politically, this compels believers to dismantle systems of oppression, such as racism, economic disparity, and gender inequality. They are also compelled to advocate for fair policies in areas like criminal justice reform, labor rights, and tax equity. This often places believers in tension with political systems that prioritize power, profit, or privilege over justice.

The prayer emphasizes a collective flourishing, not individual gain. Politically, this can inspire support for policies that address public health, education, and social welfare. This fosters resistance to political ideologies that favor extreme individualism at the expense of communal well-being.

The Kingdom of God subverts worldly power structures, exalting humility and service over domination. This means holding leaders accountable for ethical governance, integrity, and transparency. It also means advocating for policies

that limit the abuse of power, such as campaign finance reform and anti-corruption measures.

The prayer is a call for heavenly peace on earth. Politically this requires advocating for diplomatic solutions to conflict rather than war or violence. It calls for the promotion of restorative justice over punitive measures. In the same way, as heaven reflects the flourishing of creation, believers should also interpret this as a call for ecological stewardship. This means supporting environmental protections, sustainable energy policies, and climate justice. This includes challenging political systems driven by unchecked resource exploitation.

All are welcome in the kingdom, particularly those on the margins. Politically, this manifests as advocacy for immigrants, refugees, and those excluded from political or economic systems. It also manifests as a critique of nationalist or exclusionary policies that contradict the inclusive nature of God's kingdom.

The call to embody God's kingdom on earth often transcends partisan divides, as no party or ideology fully reflects God's will. This leads believers to prioritize kingdom values over loyalty to political parties or nationalistic agendas. They are also led to offer a prophetic critique of all political platforms that conflict with justice, mercy, and humility.

The Kingdom of God begins with small, transformative actions that grow into larger results of change (e.g. the mustard seed parable). Politically, this suggests mobilizing at the local level to enact systemic change. It also means supporting community-led initiatives that challenge top-down governance. The prayer's focus on heavenly priorities calls for a critique of policies that prioritize economic growth at all costs.

Believers are to advocate for economic policies that prioritize human dignity over profit. They are also called to support ethical trade, living wages, and anti-exploitation measures.

Existing Systems

Rather than endorsing a single system outright, it is best to critique and re-imagine them in light of these values. With a vision toward the future realization of God's promises our vision for kingdom focused system would be shaped by justice, freedom, community, and solidarity. Capitalism is a system driven by competition, profit, and the exploitation of resources, prioritizing individual gain over communal well-being. It is not a kingdom system because it perpetuates inequality, makes creation a commodity, and contradicts the justice, peace, and solidarity central to God's kingdom. Believers

are called to challenge the dehumanizing aspects of capitalism, living as faithful stewards of creation.

Let's compare some of the modern existing systems and how believers might view them.

1. 'Democratic Socialism' attempts to balance individual freedom with communal responsibility. It seeks economic justice and equitable distribution of resources while maintaining democratic freedoms. The interconnectedness of humanity aligns with Democratic Socialism's prioritization of the common good over unchecked individualism. This system critiques capitalist systems for their fostering of greed, exploitation, and environmental degradation.

Democratic Socialism might be a promising framework for striving toward justice, especially if infused with kingdom principles like mercy, humility, and racial inclusion. However, it must be urged by believers to avoid its secular limitations by rooting their vision in hope and love.

2. Socialism: We can readily share socialism's critique of capitalism's injustices, particularly its tendency to dehumanize workers and prioritize profit over people.

However, the rigid or authoritarian forms of socialism fall short because any system aligned with the kingdom must respect human dignity and freedom. Authoritarian socialism, with its top-down control, risks suppressing these values.

Socialism's emphasis on equitable distribution aligns with the biblical vision of heaven on earth, particularly in caring for the poor and marginalized. Believers in this system would need to draw on a commitment to justice and economic equality while resisting forms of socialism that erode personal freedoms or concentrate power in elites.

3. Communism and Marxism: Believers can appreciate the deep analysis of class struggle and its goal of a classless society, however, we cannot ignore its atheistic foundations.

The idea of shared resources resonates with early Christian practices, such as in Acts 2.44-45, where believers shared everything in common. However, Marxism’s reduction of human existence to economic categories conflicts with a holistic, spiritual understanding of humanity.

The historical implementations of communism often suppressed freedom and imposed state control, which is incompatible with the kingdom’s vision of liberation and participation. While the goal of abolishing exploitation aligns with the kingdom, believers should be cautioned against adopting Marxism wholesale. Instead, a reinterpretation in light of a Christ-centered vision of justice and freedom is needed.

4. A Kingdom-Centered Perspective: A perfect earthly system cannot be proposed because no human political or economic system can fully

embody the values of the kingdom. Instead, we should look to a theological framework where systems would prioritize the liberation of the oppressed and the pursuit of justice. The kingdom is not imposed from above but emerges through free, participatory relationships rooted in love.

Believers should prioritize those on the margins, ensuring their voices shape society. The flourishing of creation, requiring economic systems to prioritize sustainability is crucial.

Believers should advocate for a critical and creative engagement with existing systems, striving to reform them. They are called to live in anticipation of God's future, enacting glimpses of that reality here and now. Instead of aligning with any system, believers should critique all systems through the lens of kingdom values.

The kingdom grows through small, transformative actions that challenge systemic sin- this includes advocating for policies that reflect it without being limited to existing systems. Believers can imagine and work toward new forms of political and economic life shaped by God's promises.

Therefore, believers cannot endorse any of the systems mentioned outright but might view elements of these systems as stepping stones toward a more just and participatory society. Ultimately, the Kingdom of God transcends all human systems, challenging believers to strive for

a world marked by radical love, justice, and hope, while recognizing that the full realization of this vision lies in God’s hands.

Promoting The Kingdom

Organizations that promote the values of God's Kingdom become critical because they embody and anticipate this future reality in tangible ways. These organizations serve as a witness to the Kingdom of God by embodying its values in the present. They provide a foretaste of the coming reality where God's justice and peace reign fully.

They challenge systemic injustices and work to transform society in ways that reflect God's ultimate purposes for creation. Being rooted in hope, these groups become visible expressions of Christian hope, showing that change is possible and that God's promises are being realized.

Believers are called to participate in God's mission (Missio Dei). By being involved in these organizations we join in God's redemptive work in the world. With a focus on the "crucified God", engagement with these organizations allows us to stand in solidarity with those who suffer, reflecting Christ's own identification with the oppressed.

Faith is not merely intellectual but deeply practical. Involvement in these organizations allows believers to live out their faith in concrete ways. The work of these organizations and our involvement in them are not merely optional but essential. They are a sign of the inbreaking of

God's kingdom and a way for us to actively participate in God's ongoing renewal of the world.

The leading organizations embodying these values vary depending on theological perspectives, local needs, and the specific issues they address. However, successful and radical organizations that align with the transformative vision of God's justice, peace, and care for the marginalized often share common traits: boldness in addressing systemic injustices, faith-based missions rooted in hope, and practical, innovative action.

The success of these organizations is not just in tangible outcomes but in their faithfulness to the kingdom's radical values. Supporting them is a way to live out faith in action, aligning with the call for believers to actively participate and embody God's future renewal of the world.

The values of the kingdom are fundamentally self-giving, radical, and oriented toward justice, reconciliation, and hope- not self-promotion or the pursuit of comfort or prestige. Believers must critique organizations or groups that exploit kingdom ideals for ego, fame, or profit as failing to align with the true nature of the kingdom. Therefore it is crucial to discern true kingdom work.

True kingdom work prioritizes the needs of the least, the lost, and the left behind. We should see a real work towards dismantling unjust systems,

not just superficial fixes or performance acts of charity and self-congratulation. The organization and its workers will reflect the humility of Christ, who "came not to be served, but to serve" (Mark 10.45). It is also important to look for the fruit of their labor rather than its public visibility or acclaim.

it is important for believers to look for the co-opting of kingdom language or agendas that are self-serving. Believers should always be mindful that the Kingdom of God does not align with any human agendas- political, institutional, or personal- and must always remain a critique of our actions. As Jesus has said, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18.36). Organizations or individuals claiming to represent the kingdom must stand under radical, self-giving critique especially wherever they agree with the world, or vice-versa.

5

A VISION OF A NEW CREATION

A vision of the new creation is one of the most profound and central elements of a theology of hope. The Kingdom of God is the fulfillment of the new creation and vice versa. The kingdom is the ultimate purpose of creation and its eschatological transformation into the new creation. The vision is rooted in the eschatological hope of God's promise for the renewal of all things. It is deeply biblical, richly imaginative, and radically transformative.

Foundation of The Vision: A Biblical Basis

The foundation draws from both the Old and the New Testaments, interpreting these through the

lens of God's ultimate promise to renew and reconcile all things in heaven and earth.

We can begin with the doctrine of creation, emphasizing that God created the world as "very good" (Genesis 1.31). This sets the stage for understanding the new, not as a destruction of the old, but as its transformation and fulfillment. The original harmony in Eden, where humanity lived in peace with God, each other, and creation, provides the archetype for the new creation promised in the eschaton. The themes of care and human responsibility for the earth (Genesis 1.28-30;2.15) are central to the ecological dimension of the new creation.

Isaiah's vision of harmony in creation (Isaiah 11.6-9) is where natural enemies (the wolf and the lamb, the lion and the ox) coexist peacefully. This image signifies the reconciliation of all creation under God's reign. It also points to the end of violence and the establishment of divine peace (shalom), a key element of the new creation.

Isaiah's prophecy of a "new heavens and a new earth" (Isaiah 65.17-25) serves as a cornerstone for a theology of hope. It presents a vision of renewal, where suffering, death, and injustice are eliminated, and joy and abundance are restored. This is a foretaste of the eschatological future.

The psalmist's celebration of the diversity and beauty of creation (Psalm 104) reinforces the idea

that new creation involves the renewal of the physical world, not its destruction. This hymn of creation reflects God's ongoing relationship with the natural world and the promise to sustain and restore it.

Ezekiel's vision of dry bones (Ezekiel 37.1-14) coming to life represents God's power to bring renewal and resurrection, even in the face of death and despair. This is a metaphor for both personal resurrection and the renewal of creation, illustrating God's ability to transform what seems lifeless into new life.

In the New Testament, we begin with Romans 8:1-23 where Paul writes that creation itself is subjected to frustration but waits in eager expectation for its liberation from bondage to decay. This emphasizes the interconnectedness of humanity and creation in God's redemptive plan. The liberation of creation is not separate from human salvation but is part of the same eschatological vision.

Paul's declaration that new creation begins with those in Christ (2 Corinthians 5.17) points to the transformative power of God's grace, which begins in individual lives but extends to all of creation. This verse highlights the already-present reality of new creation in the lives of believers, even as its fullness remains in the future.

In Colossians 1.15-20 we see Christ's cosmic role as the head of creation and the one through whom

all things will be reconciled to God. This underscores the universal scope of new creation, extending beyond humanity to include the entire cosmos.

One of the most pivotal texts is Revelation 21.1-5 which describes the descent of the "New Jerusalem", where God dwells with humanity, wiping away every tear, and death is no more. This is the consummation of God's redemptive work, where heaven and earth are united, and God's presence permeates all things. The continuity between the old creation and the new, where transformation, not destruction, is the key.

The imagery of the river of life flowing from God's throne (Revelation 22.1-5), bringing healing to the nations, is central to ecological theology. It reflects the restoration of creation's vitality and abundance.

Personal resurrection may be linked to the broader new creation in the transformation of our "lowly bodies" to be like Christ's glorious body (Philippians 3.20-21). This personal renewal mirrors the cosmic renewal promised in the eschaton.

A Renewed Cosmos: God Dwelling with Creation: The culmination of the biblical promise is the idea of God dwelling with creation in a renewed cosmos. This is the ultimate expression of God's presence and relationship with creation- a reality where God's indwelling brings

reconciliation, transformation, and eternal communion with all creatures.

The renewed cosmos is entirely permeated by God's presence. This is not merely a return to the harmony of Eden but a transformation that exceeds the original creation, bringing it into the fullness of God's glory.

The vision of God's indwelling presence is deeply Trinitarian. God the Father is the Creator who sustains and transforms the world into its intended purpose. Through his resurrection, Christ becomes the "firstborn of all creation" (Colossians 1.15) and the mediator through whom God and creation are reconciled. The Spirit of Life renews and fills creation, ensuring that God's presence is not external but indwells all things, animating and glorifying the cosmos.

The mutual indwelling of the Trinity (Perichoresis) is at the core of the renewed cosmos. just as the Father, Son, and Spirit dwell in one another, so God will dwell in creation, and creation will dwell in God. This mutual indwelling reflects the deep relationality at the heart of the new creation.

The imagery of the "New Jerusalem" descending is central to understanding God's dwelling with creation. In Revelation 21.23, "And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illuminated it, and its lamp is the Lamb". This symbolizes the fullness of God's

presence as the source of life and illumination for all creation.

God's indwelling presence eradicates death, suffering, and injustice. All creation is unified in worship and communion with God.

The dwelling of God with creation is where creation finally enters into the rest and peace of God, the eschatological Sabbath. The Sabbath is not inactivity but the joyous harmony of all creation living in his presence. This is the fulfillment of God's covenantal promise to dwell with God's people. This is the realization of the covenant made with Israel (Exodus 29.45) and expanded to all creation in Christ. (Colossians 1.19-20).1 Corinthians 15.14-49 speaks of the resurrection body "being raised in glory". Just as the believer's bodies are transformed into glorious, imperishable forms, so too is creation glorified itself.

The concept of Shekinah (God's indwelling presence) is extended to the entirety of creation. In the renewed cosmos, God's glory becomes fully manifest and creation reflects God's beauty and holiness

The Kingdom of God reaches its ultimate fulfillment in the renewed cosmos where God's reign is fully established, and all things made new and brought into harmony. The new creation is not merely a spiritual realm but a renewed physical

reality, where heaven and earth are united, and God's indwelling with creation is eternal.

Redemption of Time

With the vision of the new creation centering on the idea of a redeemed and transformed cosmos the redemption of time is an integral part of that vision. This reflects God’s ultimate reconciliation of history, the fulfillment of human and cosmic existence, and the healing of the brokenness caused by sin, suffering, and death.

History and time must be viewed through an eschatological lens. Time is not a linear progression toward decay but is moving toward a divine goal- the coming of God’s kingdom. Time is redeemed when it reaches its purpose in the new creation. The resurrection of Christ is the turning point in history, introducing the hope that time is not an endless cycle of suffering or meaningless repetition but a dynamic journey toward God’s promised future.

The redemption of time involves the healing of the past. God’s future not only transforms the present but also addresses the pain, loss, and injustices of history. The redemption does not erase the past but reinterprets it within the context of God’s ultimate purposes This can be described as the “remembrance of God” in which the past is redeemed, reconciled, and finds its meaning in the new creation.

Eternal life is not timelessness or an escape from time as a transformed experience of it within the new creation. Time is no longer characterized by death, entropy, or alienation in this redeemed existence. Instead, it becomes an open, joyous participation in the eternal life of God. Time becomes a space for ongoing creative and relational possibilities rather than limitation and loss.

The redemption of time is directly tied to the Sabbath, the “rest” of creation in God’s presence. The Sabbath symbolizes the fulfillment of time, where creation is no longer bound by labor, striving, or futility. In the eschaton, the eternal Sabbath represents the consummation of creation in peace, joy, and freedom. This is the ultimate redemption of time, where creation rests in harmony with God.

In the new creation humanity and creation will participate in God’s eternity, which is not static but dynamic and relational. Time and eternity are united in the redeemed cosmos, allowing creatures to share in God’s unending life while retaining their distinctiveness and history. This view avoids the annihilation of time while affirming its transformation.

A World Without Suffering or Death

The new creation is a “world without suffering or death”, representing the culmination of God’s

redemptive work, where the wounds of creation are healed, and life flourishes in perfect harmony. This is grounded in biblical promises, such as Revelation 21.4, “and he will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.”

Death is not a natural part of creation but an intrusion resulting from sin and alienation. In the new creation, it will be abolished (1 Corinthians 15.26). This does not mean the elimination of change or growth but the removal of death’s power to separate, destroy, or end life. Life in the new creation is characterized by the resurrection of the body, where humanity shares in Christ’s victory over death. The resurrected body is incorruptible, no longer subject to decay or mortality.

This is a world in which all forms of suffering- physical, emotional, and spiritual- are eliminated. This includes not only individual pain but also systemic suffering caused by injustice, exploitation, and violence. Suffering often arises from alienation- between God, humans, and creation. These relationships will be fully reconciled, leading to deep peace and joy.

Eternal life is not an unchanging, timeless state. Instead, it is characterized by a dynamic meaningful existence. It is a world filled with creativity, relationships, and joy, where time is

redeemed and becomes the arena of endless possibilities. In the absence of death, time is no longer a countdown to an end but an eternal unfolding of God's love and creation's potential.

This is a world that is vibrant, joyful, and relational. People live in perfect peace and mutual love, free from fear, oppression, or inequality. All divisions of race, class, and gender are reconciled, creating a unified community that reflects God's image. Nature flourishes without destruction or decay. Animals, plants, and ecosystems coexist harmoniously.

Life in this new world is marked by worship, creativity, and exploration. Humanity participates in God's passive existence but through meaningful and dynamic life.

Relationships

The focus of the vision of the new creation is on restored relationships, meaningful existence, and the dynamic nature of life in the new creation. While much can be left to the imagination on what this is to look like, there are profound insights to be gained through a theology of hope of what relationships, daily life, and activity might look like in a redeemed world.

Relationships that were broken, damaged, or incomplete in this life will be healed and reconciled in the new creation. Love will no longer be hindered by sin, misunderstandings, or the fear

of loss. Instead, relationships will be characterized by perfect mutual love and joy, reflecting the eternal communion of the Triune God. It is hard to detail whether we will recognize specific individuals, however, with an emphasis on resurrection and continuity between this life and the next suggests that personal identity and memory are preserved. (1 Corinthians 15.44; Luke 24.36-43; Revelation 21.3; Isaiah 65.17; John 20.16) This means that bonds of love formed in this life are not erased but transformed, deepened, and perfect.

Relationships in the new creation will not be limited to those we loved in this world. They will extend to the entire community of humanity and creation, characterized by harmony. There will be no exclusivity or alienation.

Marriages from this life will be transformed and perfected. Love in this life will not be lost but will become part of the universal community of love in God’s presence. Marriage as an earthly institution may no longer exist, but the bond of love shared between spouses will be fulfilled in ways that surpass human understanding.

Daily Life

The new creation is not a static or passive existence. Instead, life will be vibrant and dynamic, filled with purpose and creativity. Daily life will not involve monotony but will reflect the

fullness of human and divine flourishing. Worship is not to be limited to rituals or services but becomes a way of life. It is the joyful acknowledgment of God's glory in all things, expressed through creativity, relationships, and participation in the divine life. The infinite nature of God and the transformed creation suggests that life will involve ongoing discovery, learning, and exploration. The redeemed cosmos will offer endless opportunities for growth, creativity, and delight.

Work will be transformed from toil and struggle into meaningful, joyful activity. Work will no longer be marked by exploitation, exhaustion, or frustration, but will become a form of creative expression and contribution to the flourishing of others. Humanity's role as co-creators with God is fulfilled as we joyfully participate in God's ongoing creativity. This could involve caring for creation, developing beauty, or contributing to communal life in ways that align with our unique gifts and identities.

The oppressive economic systems of this world, marked by inequality, competition, and scarcity, will no longer exist. Instead, all needs will be met in the abundance of God's provision, and work will be freed from the constraints of necessity.

Life will likely involve artistic expression, music, and the creation of beauty. These activities reflect humanity's God-given creativity and serve as acts

of worship and celebration. Communal celebration and the delight of being in perfect harmony with others will fill our time. Life will not be constrained by the need to “fill time” but will instead flow naturally from God’s life-giving presence.

Challenges to the Vision

This vision of the new creation faces several challenges from both within Christian theology and from broader societal perspectives. These challenges arise from theological questions, philosophical concerns, and practical difficulties in applying this vision to the real world.

One challenge is the question of how the continuity between this life and the new works in a physical sense. Others may question the continuity of creation through the resurrection of the body as to how a renewed world can exist alongside a transcendent and spiritually perfect new creation. How can the brokenness of the world and the pain of physical existence be entirely redeemed without undermining the physical reality of the new creation?

The transformation of the current world raises the question of how the profound evil, suffering, and destruction we experience now can truly be redeemed. Some may argue that the depths of suffering in the present world seem irreconcilable with the idea of a perfectly redeemed creation, challenging the idea of total restoration.

The vision of a new creation confronts the enduring issue of the problem of evil and suffering (theodicy). Some may argue that the scope of suffering in the world- including the suffering of innocents, systemic injustices, and natural disasters- challenges the notion that all will be healed. How can a good and all-powerful God allow such evil to persist for so long, even if the new creation offers ultimate redemption? A theology of hope may not satisfy those who seek a fully rational explanation of evil in the present world.

The concept of the ultimate reconciliation of all things could raise questions about justice. Can true justice be done if all are ultimately reconciled? Is the idea of universal redemption undermined if people are not held accountable for their wrongs in the present life? These tensions can lead to disillusionment or despair. People may struggle with cynicism or apathy when progress toward these goals seems slow, difficult, or even impossible, These also may be challenging for the Church in society due to itself being marked by disunity, internal strife, failure, or even engaging in perpetuating some of the injustices.

Conservative communities, particularly those with apocalyptic views might resist a hope-filled vision of the new creation. They might prefer a more traditional understanding of eschatology that focuses on personal salvation or a distant, future

heaven leading to theological resistance. The need to challenge oppressive power structures and systems of inequality and the dismantling of entrenched political, economic, and social systems is an immense challenge.

Systems of power- ranging from political corruption to corporate greed and structural racism- are difficult to change, and many people find themselves caught in these systems with little recourse for substantial change. The challenge becomes how to mobilize for systemic transformation in light of the reality that these forces are deeply entrenched in society.

In a world marked by violence, war, and political instability hope for a peaceful, reconciled creation might seem far from achievable. The ongoing global conflicts and the rise of nationalism and authoritarianism may cause many to wonder how the vision of the new creation can be realized in such a divided and polarized world.

Stressing that the ultimate act of God's redemption raises questions about human agency. If the new creation is entirely God's work, what is humanity's role in this process? Some may struggle with the idea that God will accomplish the redemption of all things, while others wonder how human free will and responsibility fit into the framework of divine redemption. How much should Christians actively engage in transforming the

world, and how much is a matter of trusting in God’s ultimate plan?

These challenges do not negate the vision of a new creation but highlight the complexities involved in living out the hope of the new creation in a broken world.

Challenge of Eschatological Tension: The eschatological tension between the already and not yet poses several challenges to the vision of a new creation. The future world is without suffering, death, and injustices but we still live in a world full of these realities. How can we hold onto hope of the new creation while facing present suffering? How can people meaningfully work toward this future when the world still seems dominated by sin, suffering, and death? The answer is, Christian hope fuels resistance. Believers should not passively wait but actively participate in movements of justice, healing, and peace.

The hope is for the transformation of this world, and not a replacement raises these questions: How much of the current world will be preserved in the new creation? Will personal identity, history, and relationships remain the same, or will they be radically changed? The challenge is balancing the idea that God redeems creation rather than discarding it while also acknowledging that the new creation must be radically different to eliminate suffering and death.

What does the coming of the new creation mean for human responsibility? Some theological perspectives emphasize waiting for God to act, while others see a role for human participation. If the future is secure in God's hands, does that lead to passivity? If we are responsible for working toward the new creation, does that make human effort the primary driver? The new creation is God's promise, but believers are called to anticipate it in their lives by promoting justice, reconciliation, and care for creation.

The vision of the new creation includes the ultimate reconciliation of all things in Christ (Colossians 1.20), but this leads to tension regarding divine judgment. If the new creation includes all people, does that undermine divine justice? If some are excluded through judgment, is the new creation truly universal? It is traditionally believed that justice means a ruling against us, but a merciful God rules in our favor.

History is open-ended, moving toward a future transformation. If history is moving toward a final new creation, why does it seem like history repeats suffering and oppression? How can we be sure that God's future will ultimately come to fulfillment? This tension between God's promises and the apparent delay of their fulfillment is a challenge to faith, but that hope is what sustains believers in the in-between time.

Human Resistance: This is both a barrier to the realization of the new creation and a necessary response to the injustices of the present world. Human resistance to God's transformative work manifests in multiple ways, but it also calls believers to active participation in anticipating it. People resist God's redemptive work, both individually and collectively. Humans often resist God's renewal by clinging to personal power, greed, and injustice. Political, economic, and social structures often oppose the values of God's kingdom, favoring exploitation. Some resist hope itself, believing that change is impossible or that suffering is inevitable. This is a real challenge to the coming of the new creation as it can slow or distort God's work in history.

Human resistance will not ultimately stop the new creation, because God's future is certain. However, God does not force transformation-instead, he works through love, justice, and suffering to persuade and invite humanity into the coming renewal. The result of this resistance results in the pro-longing of injustice and suffering, but will ultimately not stop the coming of the new creation.

6

ENEMIES OF THE CROSS

The Kingdom of God and the Cross of Christ are inextricably linked. The cross is not a necessary

prelude to the kingdom but is the very revelation of God's kingdom and the ultimate manifestation of God's reign. This is where the kingdom is brought into history, so to be an enemy of the cross is inherently to be an enemy of the kingdom.

In Christ's crucifixion, God does not merely observe human suffering from a distance but fully participates in it. It is not just an event in human history but a moment in which God experiences suffering within himself. Taking these words from Mark 15.34, "My God, My God, Why have you forsaken me?" we can see that Jesus suffers as the abandoned Son. God the Father suffers the loss of his Son. This moment of forsakenness is a rupture within God's own being, meaning that God understands suffering from the inside.

Unlike classical theism, which sees God as impassible (incapable of suffering), we can see that God's love is revealed in his willingness to suffer with and for humanity.

God's suffering in Christ is an act of radical solidarity with those who suffer injustice, poverty, and oppression. God is present in the suffering of the poor, persecuted, and marginalized. The cross is not just an individual salvation event but a political and social challenge. This calls the Church to act against systems of oppression.

Although the cross is the ultimate expression of God's solidarity it does not stop there, as the resurrection is essential. The resurrection of Christ

is God's answer to suffering: it does not erase pain but transforms it into hope. God's solidarity is not just in death but in the promise of new life and justice. The Christian life, therefore, is not about escaping suffering but participating in God's mission to redeem and heal the world.

If God is a "crucified God", as theologian Juergen Moltmann explains it, then Christianity cannot be a religion of comfort and power but must embrace suffering as a place where God is most present. This means the church must stand with the suffering and the oppressed, not with the powerful. True discipleship is a participation in Christ's suffering (Philippians 3.10)

Hope is not found in avoiding suffering but in trusting that God is working through it toward redemption.

Scandal of the Cross

The scandal of the cross is the way in which the crucifixion of Christ upends human expectations about God, power, and salvation. The cross is not just an event of suffering but a profound theological and political contradiction- it exposes and judges the world's systems of power while revealing a God who chooses weakness, suffering, and solidarity with the forsaken.

The cross shatters traditional conceptions of God's power and majesty. In ancient philosophy and much of classical theology, God is incapable

of suffering or change. The cross challenges these ideas because God doesn't remain distant from our human suffering but fully enters into it. This contradicts the idea of an all-controlling, unmoved deity. This is a scandal because it reveals that true divinity is not about domination or invulnerability but about love that suffers with and for others.

The cross was a Roman execution device that was meant for rebels and criminals. Jesus did not die a noble death but was publicly humiliated and abandoned. It exposes the violence and injustice of human political and religious systems. Jesus, proclaimed as King, is enthroned not in glory but on a cross- turning worldly ideas of power upside down. The theology of the cross opposes the theology of glory, which seeks a triumphant, victorious God aligned with human power structures. The scandal is that God chooses not the throne, but the gallows, not the empire but the place of the condemned.

Paul calls the cross a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles (1 Corinthians 1.23) because the Messiah was expected to bring political liberation, not die in shame. The Greeks sought wisdom, but the cross was irrational- how could salvation come through weakness? Even today, religious systems often prefer a God of miracles, success, and prosperity rather than a crucified savior. This turns Christianity into a tool

of power rather than a movement of the suffering Christ.

The cross remains a scandal because it challenges the world's expectations at every level. But this scandal is also the foundation of Christian hope- because in the crucified Christ, God is present with the forsaken and raises the dead to new life. The Church must embrace this scandal, not avoid it if it is to remain faithful to the Gospel.

Theological Enemies

There have been many theological enemies of the cross throughout history- ideas, movements, and individuals that have rejected or distorted the meaning of Christ's suffering, either by denying its significance or by using it for their own ends.

Gnosticism is an enemy of the cross because it fundamentally denies the full humanity and suffering of Christ. At its core Gnosticism rejects the idea that God could truly enter human suffering.

In ancient Gnosticism (2nd and 3rd centuries), salvation was believed to come through secret knowledge (gnosis), not through Christ's death and resurrection. This led to several distortions of Christian theology. Many Gnostics (especially the Docetists) believed Jesus only appeared to suffer but did not truly die on the cross. It saw the physical world as evil, created by a lesser god (the Demiurge), which contradicts the biblical teaching

that God created and redeems the world. It promoted an idea that only a select few could attain salvation through esoteric knowledge, rather than through Christ's suffering for all. This is a fundamental rejection of the scandal of the cross.

Gnosticism opposes the idea that the cross is where God shows his solidarity with the forsaken in three ways. First, it denies the value of the body and human suffering, seeing salvation as an escape from the material world. The resurrection affirms that salvation is not about escaping the body but about the renewal of all creation. Second, Gnosticism sees salvation as limited to those with secret knowledge whereby the gospel proclaims salvation for all people. The Church should not be an exclusive group of enlightened people. Third, in Gnostic thought the supreme God is distant and uninvolved in human suffering. In reality, God is most present where he seems most absent. A God who cannot suffer cannot love, because love means being vulnerable to the pain of others.

Arianism, a 4th-century heresy associated with Arius of Alexandria, who taught that Jesus was not fully divine but a created being. This directly undermines the cross. The Arian belief was that Jesus was not of the same substance as the Father but was a lesser divine being. However, if Jesus is not fully God, then the cross is not truly an act of

God's self-giving love- it is merely the suffering of a created being. If he is not truly God then God remains distant from suffering, contradicting the very heart of the Gospel. They turn Jesus into an intermediary rather than the God who suffers with us.

To them, Jesus' death is an obedient act, but not the means of divine salvation. If Christ is not fully God, then his death cannot be the decisive event of human salvation. Arianism fits in with the theology of power, where God remains above suffering rather than entering into it. They also make God unable to suffer which is the opposite of the God revealed on the cross. Arianism has been historically appealing because it aligned with a triumphant, ruling Christ, which made it easier to integrate Christianity with the Roman Empire.

Nestorianism was a 5th-century Christological heresy associated with Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople. He taught that Jesus was two separate persons- one divine and one human- rather than being a single person with two united natures. This was condemned at the Council of Ephesus in 431. This teaching is an enemy of the cross because it separates the human suffering of Jesus from the divine reality of God. Nestorians believe that the divine Logos and the human Jesus are distinct persons, meaning that on the cross, only the human Jesus suffers, not the divine Son of God. This misses the whole point that God himself

is present in the sufferings of Christ. Their belief that the divine nature remains untouched by suffering creates a distant God who is above pain and suffering. By this, the whole event is just a human tragedy, not an act of divine redemption. With separate natures the suffering Jesus is not fully united with God and there is no self-giving of God's love.

Pelagianism, a heresy associated with Pelagius in the 4th and 5th centuries, teaches that humans can achieve salvation through their own efforts, without the necessity of divine grace. This too was condemned at the Council of Ephesus in 431 because it denied the need for God's saving grace. This undermines the radical grace and solidarity of God in Christ's suffering. In their belief system, humans have the moral ability to achieve salvation on their own. However, if this were true, why did Christ have to suffer and die? The cross becomes meaningless if humanity can save itself. To a Pelagian sin is merely a bad habit, not an enslaving power, however, the cross reveals that sin is so deep that only God's suffering love can overcome it. Pelagianism is too optimistic about human nature, ignoring the full depth of human suffering, injustice, and alienation from God. It replaces the cross with self-sufficiency and that human effort is all that is needed for righteousness. If we can save ourselves, then we do not need a crucified God. Pelagianism leads to

a theology of glory, not to a theology of the cross. Human willpower will lead to success, holiness, and salvation, turning faith into moral striving rather than a response to the crucified Christ.

Building on Martin Luther's "theology of the cross" we can strongly criticize the **Theology of Glory** as a fundamental enemy of the cross. This seeks power, success, and triumph, whereas the theology of the cross embraces suffering, weakness, and God's solidarity with the forsaken. In this theology, God is revealed primarily in power, success, and victory which creates a false image of God- one that is distant from human pain. To the adherents of this theology, Christianity is about strength and victory over suffering. In this way, it loses its identity as a faith in the crucified Christ. Because of this, they believe that God's kingdom is about earthly power and domination. When Christianity aligns itself with political power, it abandons the way of the cross. The early church was persecuted because it followed a crucified Lord, but later Christianity became a tool of imperial power, beginning with Constantine's Roman Empire. This theology leads to a shallow, consumeristic faith whereby Christianity is about personal happiness, success, and feeling good. However, a Christianity that avoids suffering turns into self-help rather than discipleship. True faith does not promise comfort and success, but rather a cross to carry (Mark

8.34). A feel-good Christianity is not Christianity at all, but rather a betrayal of the cross.

Protestant Liberalism which emerged in the 19th century sought to reconcile Christian faith with modern rationalism, science, and humanism. It emphasized the moral teachings of Jesus, often downplaying or reinterpreting traditional doctrines, especially the supernatural aspects of Christianity. This theology reduces it to a human-centered faith and undermines the radical, salvific action of God through the cross of Jesus. This focuses on the ethical teachings of Jesus and emphasizes his moral example rather than the atoning death of Christ, thus losing its significance as the redemptive act of God. Liberalism's focus on Jesus' life and teachings can overshadow the reality that salvation comes through Christ's death and resurrection.

If humanity does not need divine salvation through atonement, then there is no need for the cross. It becomes an afterthought or even a tragic accident rather than the necessary act of God's love and redemption. Liberal theology tends to reduce human sin to a moral failing, ignoring its cosmic depth and alienation from God. They miss that only God's sacrificial love on the cross can heal the rift between humanity and God. It also emphasizes human reason, progress, and autonomy, often minimizing or reinterpreting the mystical and supernatural aspects of the Christian

faith. By this, it loses sight of the paradox of the cross- where God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom (1 Corinthians 1.25).

As we have noted, the cross is a scandal to human wisdom and reason- it subverts any attempt to create a theology based on human effort or rationality. Liberalism's focus on human autonomy and progress is at odds with the radical dependence on God demonstrated on the cross. Any theology that removes or rationalizes the cross is compromising the Gospel. A theology that reduces a sovereign God to merely a moral example or teacher ignores the divine mystery at the heart of the cross- the mystery of God's self-emptying and the God-forsakenness that Jesus experiences. Christianity is not about human striving for moral perfection, but about receiving divine grace through the crucified Christ.

Protestant Liberalism created a theological environment in which prominent theological figures such as Karl Barth and Juergen Moltmann found it necessary to break with these earlier approaches. They emerged as critical responses to what they saw as the dilution of the Gospel and the reduction of divine revelation to human reason and ethics. It is these theologians, among other similar ones, who have both inspired and informed this author.

Political Enemies

The cross is not only a theological or spiritual symbol, but also a radical political statement about God's solidarity with the suffering, the marginalized, and the oppressed. The political enemies of the cross would be those forces, ideologies, and systems that reject or undermine the message of solidarity, justice, and peace that the cross represents. The theology of the cross, particularly as it relates to politics, is deeply connected to the Kingdom of God that opposes oppression and injustice, and affirms the dignity and rights of the oppressed. The cross is a radical political symbol because it reveals the nature of God's kingdom. The Kingdom of God is not about power, domination, or conquest, but about justice, solidarity, and reconciliation. In the cross, God identifies with those who suffer unjustly- the poor, the marginalized, and the oppressed. The scandal of the cross directly contradicts the world's understanding of power and challenges the political structures that uphold injustice, exploitation, and oppression. The cross is a threat to all forms of political idolatry that seek to oppress others in the name of power, whether those are religious, economic, or political powers.

Governments that concentrate power in the hands of a few, suppress freedom, and persecute dissent, such as authoritarian regimes or dictatorships are political enemies of the cross. Historically, colonial and imperial systems have

been key examples of these enemies. Colonial powers exploit and oppress nations and people, treating them as objects of control. Such systems of domination are a denial of the solidarity with the oppressed that the cross represents. Capitalist structures that exploit labor and create inequality are another form of this opposition to the cross. Capitalism, which often thrives on inequality and exploitation of the poor contradicts the cross, where Christ identifies with the oppressed. The Kingdom of God is about liberation and justice for all. Nationalist ideologies that prioritize ethnic or national superiority over solidarity with others are another form of enemy. The cross calls all people to solidarity with others regardless of ethnicity, nationality, or background, while nationalism erects dividing walls between people.

The cross challenges the status quo in that political structures based on hierarchical power, military might, or economic control, are fundamentally at odds with the message of the cross. Any political system that seeks to maintain social or economic inequality through violence, militarization, or oppression is an enemy of the cross.

Jesus' death on the cross is a form of resistance to the political powers of his time. His crucifixion was not just a theological act but also a political act of solidarity with the oppressed. Jesus rejected the idea of the Messiah as a conqueror, which was

prevalent in the political expectations of his time, and instead embraced the path of suffering and sacrifice. This rejection of political power for a kingdom of peace and justice is at the heart of the cross and stands in opposition to all political forces that promote violence and injustice.

Neoliberalism prioritizes free-market capitalism, globalization, and individualism. Neoliberal policies often perpetuate economic inequalities and social injustice. In this sense, neoliberalism can be seen as an enemy of the cross because it undermines community and solidarity, and instead, it celebrates individual success at the expense of the poor and marginalized.

Militaristic politics which prioritize military solutions and war over peaceful negotiation, are also enemies of the cross. The cross speaks of peace and reconciliation, while militarism glorifies violence and domination. The arms industry and the military-industrial complex are anti-cross forces that promote death and destruction rather than life and restoration.

Racism and xenophobia are identified as political forces hostile to the cross. The cross calls for unity and solidarity across boundaries, while racism and xenophobia create divisions and hostilities between peoples. Shaped by the theology of the cross is the one that embraces a politics of hope. This hope is not just about an

eschatological future, but about the possibility of transformation here and now through solidarity with the suffering and the establishment of justice. The cross becomes the symbol of God's active presence in the world, where God's kingdom is not about domination but about the liberation and restoration of the world.

Cultural and Philosophical Enemies

The Enlightenment is an enemy of the cross in the sense that its emphasis is on reason, autonomy, and human progress and often misses the scandal of the cross. However, the Enlightenment is not to be rejected in its entirety. When Enlightenment thought elevates human reason over divine revelation, individual autonomy over community, and progress over suffering, it stands in opposition to the message of the cross.

The Enlightenment emphasized human reason and scientific knowledge as the ultimate sources of truth, often rejecting divine revelation. The cross, however, represents a divine mystery that cannot be fully grasped by reason alone. Enlightenment thinkers emphasized human freedom and self-determination, often reducing faith to moral philosophy or personal ethics rather than a radical encounter with Christ's suffering. The cross, in contrast, calls humanity to depend on God's grace rather than human self-sufficiency.

Enlightenment thought often promoted a belief in unlimited human progress, assuming that reason, science, and political reform would create a better world. However, this ignores the reality of sin, suffering, and injustice, which cannot be simply solved by human progress alone. The cross confronts human pride and the illusions of progress by revealing the depth of suffering and the need for divine redemption.

The secularizing tendency pushed God into the margins, often reducing Christianity to moral teachings without the suffering, crucified Christ. God is present in suffering and injustice, something Enlightenment rationalism often ignores. Enlightenment ethics (such as Kantian philosophy) emphasizes duty and universal moral laws but lacks the transformative power of grace. The cross, however, is not about moral improvement but radical reconciliation.

Friedrich Nietzsche, a 19th-century German philosopher, saw the cross as a symbol of weakness, decay, and the suppression of human strength. His “will to power” philosophy directly opposes the theology of the cross, making his critique of the cross one of the most profound intellectual rejections of Christianity in modern times. He saw Christianity- especially its focus on the cross- as a religion of weakness. He argued that the cross glorifies suffering, humility, and meekness. He saw this as anti-life and anti-

strength. He believed Christian morality suppresses the strong by elevating the weak.

He claims that it was invented by the weak (slaves, the powerless, the suffering) as a way to morally condemn the strong. The cross, for him, is the ultimate symbol of victimhood and resentment rather than power. His philosophy affirms struggle, ambition, and dominance as essential to human greatness. The cross, in contrast, calls for self-denial, sacrificial love, and the embrace of suffering, which he saw as life-denying.

Nietzsche’s famous claim that “God is Dead” was not just about atheism; he saw Christianity’s focus on suffering and self-sacrifice as leading to cultural decline. In his view, Europe’s loss of faith in Christianity was inevitable. The theology of the cross inverts this critique by arguing that the cross is not weakness but the deepest form of power and life itself. Nietzsche saw the cross as humiliation and a tool of slave morality, Jesus, however, doesn't play the victim- he confronts evil, oppression, and sin through self-giving love, something far more radical than Nietzsche’s will to power.

Nietzsche’s philosophy has contributed to hyper-individualism, the idea that personal strength, ambition, and success are all that matter. This brought on a culture that avoids suffering at all costs, treating vulnerability as weakness rather than liberating them. The belief in modern times

that Christian morality limits human potential whereby nations, corporations, and individuals pursue power at any cost.

Marxism rejects the theological significance of suffering, divine solidarity, and the hope of the resurrection in favor of a purely materialist vision of liberation through class struggle. It should, however, be acknowledged that it does share some common concerns with the theology of the cross, particularly regarding justice, oppression, and historical transformation. Marxism is fundamentally atheistic. Karl Marx saw religion as the “opium of the people,” a tool used by the ruling class to pacify the oppressed. Marxism’s materialism denies the spiritual dimension of suffering and redemption, making it an enemy of the cross’s deeper meaning.

Marxism envisions a historical revolution where the oppressed overthrow the oppressors, leading to a classless society. The kingdom of God is not merely a future utopia built by human hands but a divine promise that breaks into history through the suffering Christ. It views suffering as purely economic and political, something to be solved through revolution. If suffering has no redemptive meaning, the cross is emptied of its significance. Marxism frames history as a struggle between the oppressed and the oppressor, where justice comes through the overthrow of the ruling class. The cross, however, does not divide the world in such

a way. Instead, it calls for reconciliation, forgiveness, and the transformation of both the oppressed and the oppressor. Marxism believes in an earthly utopia where all class divisions disappear. However, human history cannot perfect itself- it is always marked by sin and the need for divine renewal.

It is important to establish that not all Marxist thought is to be rejected. Its critique of oppression, capitalism, and injustice have some overlap with the prophetic tradition of the Bible. However, without the cross, it falls into false hope.

Ecclesiastical and Practical Enemies

These are those within the Church who undermine the cross- whether through institutional power, theological distortions, or complacency toward suffering and injustice. Whenever the Church aligns itself with power, wealth, or moralism at the expense of the suffering Christ, it becomes an enemy of the cross. These enemies arise within the structure and theology of the Church itself, distorting the cross's message. These are churches that seek political influence, wealth, or prestige. When it aligns with empire, nationalism, or authoritarianism, it betrays the cross.

Joining with Martin Luther we should critique theologies that glorify success, power, and certainty, as well as those that preach prosperity,

triumphalism, or moral superiority as they distort the true meaning of the cross. When the cross becomes a mere doctrinal statement rather than a lived commitment to suffering, love, and justice it is emptied of its meaning. Faith is not just about believing in the cross but participating in its suffering and hope. Faith without works is dead (James 2.26)

Practical Enemies

These enemies appear in how Christianity is practiced in daily life, especially when faith is disconnected from Christ's suffering and the call to discipleship. When faith becomes a private, comfortable experience rather than a call to take up the cross it loses its transformative power. We are to be on the lookout for and avoid a middle-class Christianity that seeks security rather than solidarity with the poor and oppressed.

If Christianity becomes a system of rules, behaviors, and self-righteousness, it rejects the cross's message of grace and forgiveness. Legalistic and judgmental forms of Christianity that place burdens on people rather than offering liberation through Christ are enemies of the cross. To follow the crucified Christ is to stand against oppression. Christians who remain silent in the face of suffering, racism, poverty, and injustice are enemies of the cross because they refuse to carry its burden.

Persecution of the Prophetic Church

The prophetic church is a deeply engaged community that is actively participating in God's redemptive mission. This "church" serves as a living testimony to God's future, calling both society and itself to align with God's transformative purposes. It is a foretaste of God's coming kingdom, reflecting its values and realities in the present.

Persecuting the prophetic Church and silencing its call to return to its true kingdom mission constitutes enmity with the cross. This is because such actions oppose the very essence of the cross which embodies God's solidarity with the oppressed. It represents God's profound identification with human suffering and his commitment to justice. By persecuting the prophetic Church, which advocates for justice and aligns with the marginalized, one resists this divine solidarity and, consequently, becomes an enemy of the cross.

Faith entails actively working to free individuals from the various forms of oppression imposed by social, religious, and political institutions. Silencing the prophetic voice hinders the Church's mission to embody the values of the cross thereby acting in opposition to the cross's purpose. As Moltmann puts it, the crucifixion represents the "fundamental and total crucifixion of all religion:

the deification of the human heart, the sacralization of certain localities in nature and certain sacred dates and times, the worship of those who hold political power, and their power politics."

Persecuting the prophetic Church often involves maintaining established religious and political powers. Such persecution resists the cross' critique of these powers, positioning the persecutors as enemies of the cross.

Contemporary Enemies

The modern, contemporary enemies of the cross are not limited to specific religions, denominations, or individuals but are rather found in various ideological, political, and religious movements that distort or reflect the radical message of the cross.

The **Prosperity Gospel** and **Consumer Christianity** turn the cross into a symbol of personal success, wealth, and victory rather than self-sacrifice and suffering. It preaches that faith leads to financial gain and worldly blessing, ignoring the suffering servant Christ.

Fundamentalist movements, whether in Christianity, Islam, or other religions, often seek to impose rigid laws and doctrinal purity while rejecting the grace and suffering love embodied in the cross. A legalistic view of faith replaces the scandal of the cross with moralistic control. Fear of

ambiguity and change leads to an attempt to create certainty and security in religion, rather than embracing the vulnerability of the crucified Christ.

Secularism: When Christianity is reduced to a set of ethical principles or a self-help system, the cross is emptied of its radical, world-changing power. It becomes just one ideology among many rather than a divine act of love and transformation. The modern world often wants spirituality without the discomfort of the cross, seeking inspiration rather than repentance and transformation.

Institutional Survival: When churches focus on maintaining power, numbers, and social respectability instead of following Christ's radical path of suffering, they betray the cross. This includes megachurch consumerism, political pandering, and clerical abuses. These churches seek stability and security, often at the expense of prophetic witness.

Re-Emergence of Ancient Heresy

The re-emergence of ancient heresies in modern theological movements, religious traditions, and cultural ideologies is a sign that humanity continually struggles with the scandal of the cross. These heresies resurface because they appeal to deep-seated human desires- power, knowledge, certainty, moral control, and self-exaltation- which

often conflict with the radical message of God's suffering love in Christ.

Why Do They Keep Reappearing?; These are not just past mistakes but ongoing temptations that arise whenever Christianity compromises with cultural, philosophical, or political ideologies. They are attempts to evade the suffering and weakness revealed in the cross, either by:

1. Making God more distant and powerful (Arianism, Deism, Theology of Glory)
2. Elevating human effort over grace (Pelagianism, Moralism, Prosperity Gospel)
3. Replacing the suffering Christ with secret knowledge (Gnosticism, Esoteric Christianity)
4. Denying Christ's Humanity or his presence in history (Docetism, Liberalism)

The cross of Christ is the ultimate challenge to every human system of power, knowledge, and self-exaltation, so the temptation to reinterpret it or sidestep it is always present.

How Do they Manifest Today?:

1. **Arianism**: Arius (4th century) claimed Christ was created by God and not co-eternal with God, making him a lesser divine figure. This is seen most predominantly in Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormonism, and Unitarians, as well as in some liberal theologies. These view Jesus as an inspired teacher or lesser divine being rather than God crucified in human

weakness. A distant or weakened Christ cannot save. Only the God who suffers with humanity on the cross can bring true redemption.

2. **Gnosticism:** Gnostics (2nd century) taught that salvation came through hidden knowledge (gnosis) and that the material world was evil. We see this today in New Age movements, Esoteric Christianity, Mormon temple rituals, and some elitist academic theologies that treat faith as exclusive intellectual insight rather than the suffering God revealed to all. Christianity is not about escaping the world, but God's presence in it.
3. **Pelagianism**: Pelagius (5th century) taught that humans could achieve salvation through their own efforts. We see this in Legalistic Christianity, moralistic self-help movements and prosperity gospel teachings that claim success and wealth are signs of God's favor. Works do not save, only God's grace. Christianity is about mercy, not human perfection.
4. **Theology of Glory**: Many early Christian groups, influenced by Roman culture, preferred a victorious Christ rather than a suffering servant. This, too, is found in prosperity theology, Christian nationalism, and triumphalist church movements that align with power and success.

5. **Docetism:** Found in hyper-spiritual movements, where faith is about mystical experiences rather than God's presence in suffering. This is found in most extreme charismatic movements, where physical suffering is seen as a lack of faith rather than part of Christian discipleship.

Worshippers of Manna

Manna Worship, or the worship of money, wealth, and material possessions is an enemy of the cross because it directly contradicts the self-giving, suffering love revealed in Christ's crucifixion. Manna-worship aligns Christianity with power, prosperity, and self-interest. The cross challenges all idolatrous systems that enslave people to materialism and economic power.

1. It shifts trust from God to wealth. Jesus' death on the cross was the ultimate renunciation of worldly power, yet manna worship places security in financial wealth. Our biblical example is the Israelites in the wilderness (Exodus 16) who received manna daily but wanted to hoard it- signifying their lack of trust in God's provision.
2. It turns faith into a transaction, turning God into a means to personal success, reducing faith to "If I give well, God will bless me financially". Contrarily, God gives freely without seeking profit or return.

3. It replaces the suffering Christ with the theology of glory. Manna worship idolizes wealth as a sign of divine favor. The need to collect as many material possessions as possible becomes an obsession that is believed to demonstrate God's favor. At times this obsession is to their own detriment and is a blatant rejection of the scandal of the cross.

"God wants you to be rich" is the word from preachers who say faithfulness leads to financial wealth. Many churches operate like corporations, prioritizing growth, branding, and financial services over service, sacrifice, and suffering.

The obsession and love of beauty is also an enemy of the cross, especially when it becomes a form of manna worship. When beauty replaces God as the object of ultimate devotion, security, and meaning it functions as a distraction from suffering. It becomes a tool of power and exclusion and a substitute for the scandal of the cross.

The Scandal Remains

Despite the numerous enemies, the scandal of the cross remains untouched, because the cross is God's ultimate self-revelation- an event so radical, so countercultural, that no ideology, theology, or movement can fully absorb or neutralize it. No matter how many times history tries to reinterpret, domesticate, reject, or replace it, the cross

remains a stumbling block and a contradiction to every form of power, wisdom, and religious expectation.

It is not just a theological idea but an event in which God himself acted. Because it is God's own suffering and self-giving, it cannot be undone. The cross was not created by a church, a government, or a movement so none of these can eliminate it. It is not just an event in history; it is the event that defines history. Christ's resurrection does not undo the scandal of the cross but vindicates it. Thus, even today, the cross remains a scandal and a challenge to religious institutions, political and economic systems, and to individuals. No matter how many enemies attack the cross it remains untouched and undefeated, outliving all its enemies.

7

Christian Nationalism:

Irreconcilable With The Kingdom

Christian Nationalism is fundamentally irreconcilable with the Kingdom of God, the message of the cross, and the radical, inclusive nature of God’s kingdom, which transcends national, ethnic, and political boundaries. Christian Nationalism, by contrast, seeks to merge faith with national identity, often leading to exclusion, oppression, and the justification of state power in the name of God.

Christian Nationalism is not just a distortion of Christianity but is in direct opposition to the kingdom of God. The cross calls believers to reject this power-seeking ideology that is a denial of both the kingdom and the cross.

Analogia Entis

The analogia entis (analogy of being)- particularly as it developed in Catholic theology - suggests that there is an intrinsic continuity between God and creation, meaning that human reason and natural structure, (including social and political orders) can provide a legitimate, though limited, knowledge of God. It posits that there is a fundamental but analogical similarity between God's being and created being. This means that while God is infinitely beyond creation, human reason can still grasp something about him through the created order. This serves as the

foundation for natural theology whereby knowledge of God can be derived from nature, apart from revelation.

Theologian Karl Barth, in contrast, saw this as a dangerous theological move because it implied that one could discover divine truth apart from God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ. He famously called it the "invention of the Antichrist". Instead, he insisted on the analogia fidei (analogy of faith), which means that knowledge of God is entirely dependent on God's self-revelation.

Taking Barth further, Juergen Moltmann builds on his rejection while developing a more forward-looking, eschatological vision that directly challenges Christian Nationalism. As mentioned, Barth's rejection of the analogia entis means that no earthly reality- especially not a nation- can be seen as naturally reflecting God's will. Instead, revelation happens in Jesus Christ alone (analogia fidei), meaning that the Church's allegiance is not to any earthly order but to God's kingdom. This stands in direct opposition to Christian nationalism, which assumes that God's will is revealed in and through a particular nation's history, culture, or political order.

While Barth primarily focuses on revelation, Moltmann expands this critique to eschatology. The Kingdom of God is not a divine endorsement of any nation-state but a future reality breaking into the present. This means no nation can claim

to be the fulfillment of God’s purposes- only God's coming reign can do that.

Christian Nationalism is a false eschatology. It often presents a vision where a particular nation is seen as the chosen instrument of God’s purposes. This is a form of realized eschatology- assuming that the Kingdom of God is already present in a political form. A theology of hope directly opposes this by insisting that the kingdom is always ahead of us, never fully realized in any human structure. Nationalism, by claiming divine status for a particular state, is an anti-eschatological move- it shuts down hope by identifying God’s future with a present political reality.

True Christian faith follows the suffering Christ, not triumphant worldly power. Christian nationalism, however, often aligns itself with political and military strength, seeing national victories as signs of divine favor. This contradicts the very heart of the gospel, where God’s power is revealed in weakness and suffering, not in national dominance.

Both Barth and Moltmann emphasize the universality of God’s kingdom, which transcends all national boundaries. The Kingdom of God is realized in justice for the oppressed, not in the triumph of any particular nation. By prioritizing national interests, Christian nationalism stands against this vision of God’s kingdom.

The Church must embody the kingdom rather than align with any national agenda. The Church is a foretaste of God's future reign, which means it must stand apart from nationalism and act as a prophetic witness against injustice. Christian nationalism, by contrast, seeks to merge the Church with the nation, diluting its prophetic role.

The rejection of the analogia entis dismantles the theological foundation of Christian nationalism. It is not just a political error, but a betrayal of the gospel's call to hope, justice, and universal reconciliation.

Fascism

Christian Nationalism is a pathway to fascism and is its theological foundation. It is an authoritarian and nationalistic system that seeks to merge state and religious identities, often leading to the suppression of individual freedoms and the promotion of homogenous national identity. "Christofascism," is a term introduced by theologian Dorothy Soile to describe the conflation of Christian identity with national ideologies, resulting in a form of religious nationalism that supports authoritarian governance.

Christian Nationalism claims that a particular nation has a divine mandate or special role in God's plan, making loyalty to the nation a religious duty. This can justify authoritarianism and military aggression in the name of a higher purpose.

Fascist regimes often rely on myths of national revival, portraying their movements as the salvation of a people. The proverbial making a nation great again.

It provides theological cover for these myths, making resistance to the regime equivalent to heresy. Fascism benefits when the church abandons its prophetic role and becomes a servant of the state. Christian nationalism facilitates this by prioritizing political loyalty over theological integrity.

Christian nationalism often promotes the idea that defending the nation is a sacred duty, legitimizing violence, war, and persecution of outsiders. This aligns with fascist ideology, which seeks to purify and strengthen the nation through force. There have been secular fascist movements, however, when Christian nationalism is present, it provides a theological justification for fascist rule. Christian nationalism is not in and of itself fascism, but it is always authoritarian in nature, and when combined with state power it most often results in fascist-like governance.

There have been several historical examples where Christian nationalism has either supported or directly contributed to fascist movements:

Nazi Germany (1933-1945) The German Christian movement sought to align Protestant Christianity with Nazi ideology, rejecting Jewish influences in the Bible and depicting Hitler as a

divinely chosen leader. The Nazi state promoted a nationalist, racialized version of Christianity that supported the regime's authoritarian rule and policies of ethnic cleansing. The Barmen Declaration of 1934, led by Karl Barth, was a direct theological response to this, rejecting any attempt to merge Christianity with nationalism.

Francoist Spain (1939-1975): General Francisco Franco's regime promoted Catholic nationalism, declaring Spain a "Catholic State" where the church was deeply intertwined with the fascist government. It provided ideological support for the dictatorship. Legitimizing political repression and violence against dissenters as a defense of Christian civilization.

Italian Fascism (1922-1941): Mussolini initially had a secular approach, but later aligned with the Vatican through the 1929 Lateran Accords, establishing Catholicism as Italy's state religion. The church largely supported Mussolini's rule, seeing his regime as a defender of Christian values against communism and liberalism.

The Estado Novo in Portugal (1933-1974): Antonio de Oliviera Salazar's fascist regime uprooted a strong nationalist and Catholic identity, integrating the church into the state's authoritarian rule. Like Franco's Spain, the regime used religious rhetoric to justify political repression.

While few contemporary governments are outright fascist, some display strong elements of it in their Christian nationalism with authoritarian tendencies:

Russia under Vladimir Putin: The Russian Orthodox Church plays a key role in promoting nationalist ideology, supporting the government's anti-Western, anti-LGBTQ policies, and framing Russia's military aggression in religious terms.

Hungary under Viktor Orban: Orban promotes an ethnonationalist vision of Christianity, portraying Hungary as the defender of European Christian civilization while implementing authoritarian policies.

The United States: The rise of Christian Nationalist movements- particularly those seeking to merge church and state, restrict rights based on religious grounds, and portray political opponents as enemies of Christianity. This movement is growing rapidly and developing into full-fledged fascism with the backing of the protestant and evangelical churches. The second quarter of the 21st century is seeing a massive shift toward authoritarian rule with a need for societal ethnic purification. A Theology of Glory permeates the nation with a self-declared divine mission to colonize the world for the purpose of evangelizing it and gaining resources to further their "divine mission", all while being the largest instrument of

mass destruction, injustice, and oppression of the world.

Warning Signs

The Weimar Republic in Germany (1919-1933) provides a crucial historical case study for understanding how democratic societies can decline into fascism, particularly when Christian nationalism plays a role. By analyzing its collapse, we can identify warning signs and safeguards against similar developments today.

The Great Depression (1929) devastated Germany's economy, leading to mass unemployment and widespread poverty. Many Germans lost faith in democratic institutions and sought a strong leader to restore stability. When economic hardship leads to scapegoating (e.g. blaming immigrants, minorities, or political opponents) and the rise of leaders promising national redemption, the groundwork for authoritarianism is laid.

Many German Christians embraced nationalist ideologies, believing Germany had a divine destiny. The "German Christians" movement aligned Christianity with Nazi racial ideology, portraying Hitler as a God-ordained leader. When religious leaders equate nationalism with Christianity, claiming that a nation has a special divine mission, it often leads to the justification of exclusion, violence, and authoritarian rule.

The Weimar Constitution created a fragile democracy that lacked strong institutional safeguards. Hitler exploited emergency powers (Article 48) to dismantle democratic structures. Democracies erode when governments use crises- real or manufactured- to justify limiting freedoms, bypassing checks and balances, or concentrating power in the executive branch.

Nazis promoted the idea that Christianity and German culture were under siege by communists, Jews, and secular forces. This fear-driven narrative justified regressive policies. When a political movement claims that a nation's religious or cultural identity is under existential threat, it often seeks to impose religious laws, suppress opposition, and control public discourse.

While some church leaders (like Karl Barth and the Confessing Church) resisted Nazi ideology, many others accommodated or actively supported the regime. The failure of the broader church to stand against authoritarianism enabled the fascists to rise. Religious communities must remain vigilant against the temptation to trade prophetic witness for political influence. Churches should reject nationalism that distorts the gospel and resist efforts to merge Christianity with state power.

The Nazi Party and paramilitary groups like the SA (Stormtroopers) used violence to intimidate opponents. They framed war and national struggle

as spiritual and patriotic duties. The normalization of political violence, armed militias, and rhetoric glorifying conflict as a means of “saving the nation” are red flags of a society drifting toward fascism.

Nazi propaganda rewrote history to fit nationalist narratives, demonized dissenters, and spread conspiracy theories. When political movements distort history, attack the press, and promote conspiracy theories that undermine trust in democratic institutions, they pave the way for authoritarianism.

Russian Christian Nationalism

In Russia, Christian Nationalism is deeply tied to the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) and its historical role in shaping Russian identity. The ROC is not just a religious institution; it functions as a pillar of the state, supporting Vladimir Putin’s government and legitimizing his leadership. This form of nationalism emphasizes the idea that Russia is a sacred nation with a divine mission to protect Orthodox Christianity, particularly against the secular West.

The traditional Orthodox doctrine of church-state cooperation, where the state enforces orthodox values and the church blesses the state’s authority is primal. The ROC frames Western liberalism, LGBQ+ rights, and secularism as existential

threats, positioning Russia as the last defender of Christian civilization.

Russian Christian nationalism is imperial, top-down, and based on a long history of Orthodox state-church symbiosis. It is a dangerous regression into a theology of power and domination rather than one of Christ's self-giving love and eschatological renewal.

Theocratic nationalism replaces the hope for God's coming kingdom with a human-centered, political kingdom. Russian Christian nationalism, particularly during the first half of the 21st century, where its leader and the ROC claim that Russia is a holy nation with a divine mission to protect Christian civilization. However, the kingdom is not tied to an earthly empire.

Orthodox Symphonia (church-state unity) distorts the gospel by turning faith into a means of political control rather than a call to radical discipleship. Christianity should be future-oriented whereby Russian nationalism looks backward to restore a mythical Orthodox empire, making it idolatrous.

Christianity should be anti-imperial, confronting the powers and principalities (Ephesians 6.12). Russian Christian nationalism uses theology to justify military aggression (e.g. Ukraine framed as a "holy war" to reunite Huly Rus'. It replaces the Christian ethics of peace with nationalist militarism, blessing violence rather than

peacemaking. It turns the church into an arm of the state, echoing Constantinianism, which is a betrayal of Jesus' way of the cross. This is a return to Caesar's empire rather than the liberating hope of the Gospel.

The vacuum left by the collapse of the Soviet Union was filled by the leaders of this theocratic nationalism making Russian Christianity a reactionary force rather than a prophetic one. It confuses God's kingdom with a human empire seeking to control history rather than open it to God's future. It closes off hope and replaces it with fear-driven authoritarianism, the very thing Christ came to overthrow.

New Apostolic Reformation

The New Apostolic Reformation (NAR)is a loosely connected but highly influential movement within charismatic and Pentecostal Christianity in the United States that emphasizes modern-day apostles and prophets who claim divine authority to transform society. While it is not a formal denomination, it is a network of churches, ministries, and leaders who share a belief in "dominion theology"- the idea that Christians are called to take control of key societal institutions to usher in God's kingdom on Earth.

NAR leaders claim that God is restoring the biblical offices of apostle and prophet, which they believe were lost after the early church. These

figures are seen as having direct revelation from God and hold authority over churches and nations. The movement teaches that Christians must take control of seven key societal “mountains”: government, education, media, business, family, religion, and entertainment. This is often linked with Christian Nationalism, where the US is seen as having a divine mandate to be a Christian nation.

NAR emphasizes aggressive spiritual warfare against demonic forces they believe control nations and cultures. Many NAR prophets claim to receive visions or prophecies about political events and leaders. This has led to the movement’s strong backing of political figures who they see as chosen by God as seen in their overwhelming support for Donald Trump. NAR churches emphasize supernatural healing, prophecy, and even raising the dead. Movements like Bethel Church in California promote a culture of “revival” with miraculous claims.

NAR leaders often reject denominational oversight or theological accountability claiming that the Holy Spirit leads them directly. This has led to the rise of independent mega-churches and ministries with little doctrinal regulation.

This movement is gaining influence because it appeals to people who are looking for:

1. A sense of divine purpose in chaotic times

2. Direct spiritual experiences through prophecy and miracles
3. Political engagement is framed as a spiritual battle for America's future
4. Strong, charismatic leadership in an era of institutional decline.

While not outright fascist, the NAR shares authoritarian tendencies that make it susceptible to right-wing extremism such as a charismatic strongman leader, militaristic rhetoric, mass emotional mobilization, and anti-democratic tendencies. The New Apostolic Reformation represents a powerful shift in American Christianity- one that blends charismatic revivalism, dominionist politics, and prophetic authoritarianism. It is a dangerous movement that sinks deeply into power-seeking and nationalism. The creation of the White House Faith Office following the 2024 election is an invitation to NAR to be instrumental in developing the political ideology of the United States. The creation of this office is not a triumph of faith but a sign of the church's capitulation to empire.

East v West

The divide between Eastern and Western Christianity remains deeply entrenched. The schism of 1054 AD was never truly healed, and now Christian nationalism in both regions reflects the fundamental differences in their ecclesiology.

The Russian Orthodox Church sees itself as the rightful guardian of Christian civilization, rejecting Western Protestant and Catholic influence. The New Apostolic Reformation sees itself as the cutting edge of a new global Christian movement, independent of historical institutions like the Catholic or Orthodox churches.

The political expressions of both movements are in direct conflict: the United States seeks global evangelical influence, while Russia defends its own orthodox-centric sphere. Even though they have some similarities their theological foundations, political strategies, and views of authority are completely different, making reconciliation between east and west unlikely. Therefore, a Christian Nationalist takeover of the United States would likely deepen this rift rather than create a true alliance as their underlying theological and political visions remain fundamentally opposed.

A U.S. Christian Nationalist government might admire Russia's stance on traditional values, but it would likely still view Russia as a threat to American power. Meanwhile, Russia distrusts American influence and sees its evangelicalism as a tool of U.S. power.

Guarding Against It

Christians should defend democratic institutions and the separation of church and state by:

- Recognizing and resisting Christian nationalism that equates faith with national identity is crucial.
- Promote historical literacy to counter propaganda and misinformation.
- Encourage churches to remain prophetic voices rather than political tools.
- Protect civil liberties and resist authoritarian power grabs.
- Oppose scapegoating and demonization of marginalized groups.

By learning from the Weimar Republic, we can recognize the warning signs of democratic decay and resist the forces that seek to merge the Christian faith with nationalist authoritarianism.

EPILOGUE"

"On Earth As It Is In Heaven"

The words of the Lord’s Prayer have echoed through the centuries, been spoken in cathedrals and whispered in secret gatherings, Yet, they are more than a prayer- they are a call to mission.

When we pray, “Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven,” we are not simply expressing a pious hope but embracing a divine commission. We are calling forth a world transformed by justice, mercy, and love. We are pledging allegiance- not to earthly powers, but to the crucified God whose reign turns the world’s hierarchies upside down.

Christian hope is not an abstract ideal but a revolutionary force. It is not a passive waiting for heaven but an active anticipation of God’s future, breaking into the present. In this eschatological vision, the cross of Christ stands as both judgment and promise: judgment against the powers of domination and idolatry, and promise that suffering love is the power that will renew all things.

Yet, in every generation, there are those whom Paul calls “enemies of the cross of Christ” (Philippians 3.18). These are not merely atheists or those outside the Church; they are often those who claim Christ’s name while rejecting his way. They are those who seek to wield power rather than to serve, who proclaim a gospel of exclusion rather than reconciliation, and who reduce the cross to a banner of conquest rather than a symbol of suffering love.

Christian Nationalism has emerged as one of the most insidious distortions of the gospel. It binds faith to empire, conflates the Kingdom of God with

the ambitions of a nation, and preaches a false security rooted in military strength and cultural supremacy. It substitutes the crucified Christ for a Christ of power, replacing self-giving love with self-preserving fear. It baptizes injustice, calling oppression order and domination peace.

Believers are to stand as a prophetic challenge to such distortions. The Kingdom of God is not a national project, nor is it built through coercion. It is a promise that stands against all systems of exclusion and oppression, a future that draws us forward rather than a past we must reclaim. Confronting all attempts to co-opt Christ for the sake of power, reminds us that divinity is found not in triumphalism but in the suffering solidarity of God with the forsaken.

When we pray, “Your kingdom come", we reject all lesser allegiances. This prayer places us at odds with every system that seeks to enthrone human power in place of divine justice. To pray this prayer faithfully is to enter into mission- to embody the hope we proclaim.

The Lord’s Prayer is not a private spiritual exercise but a public declaration of resistance against all that opposes the Kingdom of God. Each petition is a call to action and with this prayer, we embrace the radical vulnerability of the cross. We declare our trust in God’s future, not in the crumbling idols of empire.

The Christian hope is not optimism, nor is it

naive idealism. It is hope that has passed through the cross, hope that knows the weight of suffering yet refuses to be extinguished. It is a hope that looks to the risen Christ and sees the beginning of a new creation - a creation that does not belong to any nation, but to the God who makes all things new.

As we conclude this reflection, these questions remain: Will we live as people of this hope? Will we take up the missionary call of the Lord's Prayer, standing against the enemies of the cross- not with weapons but with the suffering love of Christ? Will we fight against injustice, oppression, poverty, and the tools of the enemies of the cross, while embodying a Kingdom not of this world? Will we embody the values of God's kingdom in heaven here on earth even when earthly powers demand our loyalty?

The call remains before us. The prayer is still being spoken. "Your kingdom come, on Earth as it is in heaven." The Kingdom is still coming.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus.